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LECTURES AND ESSAYS

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LECTURES

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ESSAYS

BY

ALFRED AINGER

IN TWO VOLS.—VOL. II

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THE LETTERS OF CHARLES LAMB

THE published letters of distinguished men make, as you are aware, an important branch of English literature. To mention a few only, and those distinctively literary men, how much poorer should we be if we had not inherited the letters of Pope and Swift, of Walpole, Cowper, Gray, and Byron, and, in our own day, of Dickens and Carlyle. The letters of these, and others you will recall, form indeed a limited literature, and for that reason perhaps, like the Sibylline Books, will be ever more and more treasured. For letter-writing (of the kind that survives) began late, and I think we may safely predict will (to use the famous apology made by Charles Lamb at the India House) make up for coming late by going away early. Letters of the kind we have in view—those written to relations, and friends and associates in the writer's work or other of his interests—began to be regularly preserved only about the beginning of last century. There were doubtless interesting and charming letters

exchanged between men in the centuries before —indeed we know of many such—but with few exceptions they have perished. The reason is a simple one. In early days, letters were scarce because they were so difficult to send. In these later days (it sounds paradoxical), they are getting rarer just because they are so easy to send. For as there are "books that are no books" (*biblia abiblia*), so there are "letters" (to be counted by the million) that are "no letters," in any sense that literature or art can recognise. In these days of ours, they must be persons of a rare self-command and force of character who habitually write letters that, however well they may serve the purpose for which they were written, the world will not willingly let die.

There are of course many reasons for this—the cheapness of postage and the multiplication of posts among the chief. The singular increase in the numbers of magazines and reviews clamorous for anything that a writer of repute will send them—which causes that the clever and charming things, which a hundred years ago would have gone into a letter, now become "copy," and go into a printed article or essay—supplies another reason. The increasing wear and tear of life, reducing leisure and making brevity in letter-writing a primary consideration, supplies a third. At the same time it is to be remembered that there have been persons endowed with a peculiar faculty for expressing their best talent and noblest

selves in this particular form, and as there have been, so there may be again. Let us hope for the best.

It is an interesting theme, but I must pass it by, to dwell with you upon one notable and charming practiser of the art — the "unpremeditated art," to use Shelley's phrase—of familiar letter-writing. The letters of Lamb have a great variety of interest for us. Taken together and read in order, they form of themselves an autobiography. Of his childhood and youth; his school-time and his holiday seasons; his family and his home surroundings; and the books that trained and fostered his genius—of all these things the *Essays of Elia* tell us fully, and his letters complete the story. They begin in the year that he came of age (1796), and with a few regrettable intervals, not easy to explain, they continue in regular order until within a few days of his death, eight-and-thirty years after. I cannot recall any incident in his life (or Mary's, which is the same thing) that the letters do not deal with. All the joys and sorrows of their "dual loneliness"—all their literary pursuits, with the attendant triumphs or disappointments—will be found chronicled there. There is not one of the many sides of his singularly composite being that does not come in turn to the front. Every mood is reflected, from the deep anguish of family bereavement to the lightest vein of raillery, and even the most rollicking horse-play. For Lamb wrote differently

to different persons. This is as it should be. Letters, to be worth anything, should tell us something about the person they are written to. If a writer is in genuine sympathy with his correspondent, the letter inevitably reflects something of the nature of the friend addressed. And then, what a circle of friends and intimates Charles Lamb was privileged to have! Other famous collections of letters in our literature are memorable because of the writer, and derive but little interest from the persons addressed. Take those of the poet Cowper, perhaps the closest parallel in kind with Lamb's, and among the most fascinating and delightful reading in our literature. What do we know or care about young Mr. Unwin, or Mr. Hill, or even about Hayley or the Rev. Mr. Newton? They are really only familiar to us at all because Cowper numbered them among his correspondents. So also, I think most of you know the name of Mason chiefly through Gray's letters, and Sir Horace Mann mainly through Walpole's. But think of the chief names in the roll of Lamb's letter-writing friends—Coleridge, Southey, Wordsworth, Manning, Leigh Hunt, and Hazlitt; not to mention Bernard Barton, Godwin, Barry Cornwall, and Thomas Hood. And, as I have said, Lamb wrote differently to these different friends. Those who know and love his letters from long familiarity can recognise this variety of touch—even when the subjects of the letters are nearly akin—as he gossips

with Coleridge or Manning, with Southey or Barton.

I do not know that I can do better than illustrate from the letters themselves some of the rarer and more noticeable faculties of Lamb. And it is remarkable, as I have elsewhere observed, that the intellectual accomplishment which asserts itself earliest is just that which ordinarily it takes years, with their increasing experience and wider reading and study, to mature—I mean the critical faculty. Lamb's earliest letters that have survived begin when he was just of age, and his two chief correspondents for the next three years were young men like himself—one his old schoolfellow, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, three years his senior, and the other, whom he had come to know through Coleridge, and who was associated with Coleridge by so many close ties, Robert Southey. All three were starting on a literary career, full of ambition: two of them with the intention of making it their profession, the other, happily for himself, settling down to that desk in Leadenhall which was to prove (though he knew it not) his best blessing and safeguard for thirty years to come. Apart from the family matters—sad and terrible they were—discussed in these letters, the chief topics dealt with are literary and critical. Coleridge and Southey forward to their friend their verses, their lyrics and eclogues, for his opinion and suggestions; and he in turn submits to them

his sonnets and elegies, plaintive and tender after his model William Lisle Bowles. Coleridge and Southey, each endowed with a poetic gift far stronger and richer than Lamb's, yet at once recognise in their companion—no university man like themselves, lowly in his home and traditions, humble in his life's occupation—this rare and precious gift of critical insight. These earliest letters of Lamb show how amply justified was their confidence in his powers. If the art of poetical criticism could be made matter of instruction, I know no better introduction to the study than these scattered criticisms of his, first upon Coleridge and Southey's verse, and afterwards upon Wordsworth's, and generally upon all poetry, ancient and modern, quoted or referred to incidentally in these familiar letters. Lamb was among the first to detect the great powers of Coleridge and Wordsworth before the wit of the *Anti-Jacobin* and *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* had done their utmost to crush those writers, and while the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews* were yet unborn. This boy of twenty-one was already showing that, together with the keenest eye for the weaker side of these poetical reformers, with a true humourist's enjoyment of what was absurd or puerile in their methods, that enjoyment in no way disturbed his appreciation of their genius. With all his prejudices and petulances (and Lamb had plenty of these) the distinguishing feature of

his critical power is its width and its versatility. The deepest of all his literary affections, that for Milton, no more interfered with his intense enjoyment of Pope, than did his delight in Pope delay for an instant his recognising the value of Cowper and Burns and their successors. Lamb is our best and wholesomest example of that rare ability to value and enjoy one great literary school without at the same time disparaging its opposites. And he had that even rarer ability to recognise that the same writer often rises above himself, and often sinks below it. These early letters to Coleridge are full of proofs of this. He laughs as frankly at what was namby-pamby in Coleridge and Wordsworth, as he descants with genuine enthusiasm on the "Ancient Mariner" and the "Lines written above Tintern Abbey." He anticipates, curiously enough, the *Anti-Jacobin* in parodying Southey and Coleridge's "dactylics" on the "Soldier's Wife," which Coleridge had sent him in a letter in the summer of 1796: "What shall I say," he replies, "to your *dactyls*? They are what you would call good *per se*, but a parody on some of 'em is just now suggesting itself, and you shall have it rough and unlicked; I mark with figures the lines parodied:

4. Sorely your dactyls do drag along limp-footed.
5. Sad is the measure that hangs a clog round 'em so.
6. Meagre and languid, proclaiming its wretchedness.
1. Weary, unsatisfied, not little sick of 'em.

11. Cold is my tired heart, I have no charity.
2. Painfully trav'lling thus over the rugged road.
7. O begone, measure, half-Latin, half-English then.
12. Dismal your dactyls are, God help ye, rhyming ones!" [1]

Many of you will recall how irresistibly these unfortunate "experiments in metre" by poor Southey appealed to the parodying-instinct of his enemies. Canning and Frere both had their fling at them in the *Anti-Jacobin*; Byron has his allusion in the familiar line,

God help thee, Southey, and thy readers too:

but Lamb, you see, had been before them, and yet, because he was an all-round, and not a one-sided critic, he passed for a blind worshipper of the young Jacobins. "Messrs. Lamb and Lloyd," says Byron in a note to the mention of their names in *English Bards*, "the most ignoble followers of Southey and Co." How little he knew!

Or again, notice the following curious criticism and prediction concerning a too-well-known

[1] [The lines are as follows, the first, second, and fourth stanzas being by Southey, the third by Coleridge:—

Weary way-wanderer, languid and sick at heart,
Travelling painfully over the rugged road,
Wild-visaged wanderer, ah, for thy heavy chance!

Sorely thy little one drags by thee barefooted,
Cold is the baby that hangs at thy bending back,
Meagre and livid and screaming its wretchedness.

Woe-begone mother, half anger, half agony,
As o'er thy shoulder thou lookest to hush the babe,
Bleakly the blinding snow beats in thy haggard face.

Thy husband will never return from the war again,
Cold is thy hopeless heart even as charity—
Cold are thy famished babes; God help thee, widowed one.]

effusion of Coleridge's. In 1796 Coleridge had published his first little volume of poems. At the end of that year a second edition is in preparation, and its author is consulting Lamb as to what poems are to be retained from the former, and what new ones are to be added. Coleridge was (oddly enough) for omitting the musical and buoyant stanzas imitated from Ossian, called the "Complaint of Ninathoma," and beginning,

> How long will ye round me be swelling,
> O ye blue-tumbling waves of the sea?

and Lamb earnestly pleads for their being allowed to stand:—

> Let me protest strongly against your rejecting the "Complaint of Ninathoma," on page 86. The words, I acknowledge, are Ossian's, but you have added to them the "music of Caril." If a vicarious substitute be wanting, sacrifice (and 'twill be a piece of self-denial *too*) the "Epitaph on an Infant," of which its author seems so proud, so tenacious. Or if your heart be set on *perpetuating* the four-line wonder, I'll tell you what to do: Sell the copyright of it at once to a country statuary; commence; in this manner, Death's prime poet-laureate; and let your verses be adopted in every village round, instead of those hitherto famous ones,
>
> Afflictions sore long time I bore,
> Physicians were in vain.

You will not need telling that Lamb referred to the quatrain,

> Ere sin could blight or sorrow fade,
> Death came with timely care,

to which Coleridge had allotted a whole page of his former edition, and of which he had indeed shown himself "tenacious," for it had already appeared twice before, in the *Morning Post* and in the *Watchman.* Coleridge was, perhaps, a little nettled at his friend's frank criticism, for he rejected "Ninathoma" (though he restored it in later editions) and retained the epitaph. But Lamb's playful prediction was destined to be fulfilled. No country statuary ever secured a monopoly of the lines, but they will be found, as you know, in almost every churchyard in the kingdom.

So far we have only discovered that Lamb possessed that easy and common critical faculty which detects the weaknesses of a writer; but side by side may be found abundant proof that he recognised at once the strength and value of the new poetry, while other critics were only perplexed by its novelty and uncertain what to think. In 1798 Wordsworth and Coleridge published their little joint volume, the *Lyrical Ballads*, containing among other now familiar and classical poems, the "Ancient Mariner." Even Southey, it appears, was offended by Coleridge's masterpiece, and Lamb writes to him, in November of that year, to remonstrate:—

> If you wrote that review in *Critical Review*, I am sorry you are so sparing of praise to the "Ancient Mariner"; so far from calling it, as you do, with some wit but more severity, "A Dutch Attempt, etc.,

etc.," I call it a right English attempt, and a successful one, to dethrone German sublimity. You have selected a passage fertile in unmeaning miracles, but have passed by fifty passages as miraculous as the miracles they celebrate. I never so deeply felt the pathetic as in that part,

> A spring of love gushed from my heart,
> And I blessed them unaware.

It stung me into high pleasure, through sufferings. Lloyd does not like it; his head is too metaphysical, and your taste too correct; at least, I must allege something against you both to excuse my own dotage—

> So lonely 'twas, that God Himself
> Scarce seemèd there to be.

But you allow some elaborate beauties—you should have extracted 'em. The "Ancient Mariner" plays more tricks with the mind than that last poem, which is yet one of the finest written.

"That last poem," here referred to, is no other than the immortal poem of Wordsworth's, which had been placed last in the little joint volume—the "Lines written above Tintern Abbey." The world was long in making up its mind on the subject, for the professional reviewers of that day would have nothing to say to it; but Lamb's judgment has prevailed, that most assuredly among England's finest poems is that which contains the lines,

> For I have learned
> To look on Nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
> The still sad music of humanity,

> Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.

But Lamb could do more, as a critic, than see the ridiculous on the one hand, and the sublime on the other. He could judge of details, and he could discriminate. Two years after this letter to Southey, Wordsworth brought out a second volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and sent it to Lamb, who writes back :—

Thanks for your letter and present. I had already borrowed your second volume. What most please me are the "Song of Lucy" [he means, of course, "Lucy Gray"]; . . . Simon's sickly daughter, in the "Sexton," made me cry. Next to these are the description of the continuous echoes in the story of "Joanna's Laugh," when the mountains and all the scenery absolutely seem alive; and that fine Shakspearean character of the "happy man" in the "Brothers"

> that creeps about the fields
> Following his fancies by the hour, to bring
> Tears down his cheek or solitary smiles
> Into his face, until the setting sun
> Write Fool upon his forehead.

I will mention one more—the delicate and curious feeling in the wish for the "Cumberland Beggar" that he may have about him the melody of birds, altho' he hear them not. Here the mind knowingly passes a

fiction upon herself, first substituting her own feelings for the Beggar's, and, in the same breath, detecting the fallacy, will not part with the wish. The "Poet's Epitaph" is disfigured, to my taste, by the common satire upon parsons and lawyers in the beginning, and the coarse epithet of "pin-point" in the sixth stanza.

I may interrupt Charles Lamb for a moment to tell you that Wordsworth originally wrote the stanza thus:

> Wrapt closely in thy sensual fleece,
> O turn aside,—and take, I pray,
> That he below may rest in peace,
> Thy pin-point of a soul away.

Whether owing to Lamb's objection here made or not, in subsequent editions Wordsworth altered it to the shape in which all his readers know it,

> Thy ever-dwindling soul away.

"All the rest," Lamb proceeds, "is eminently good, and your own." I must not quote further from this remarkable letter, except to cite this just and admirable remark: "I am sorry that Coleridge has christened his 'Ancient Mariner' 'A Poet's Reverie'; it is as bad as Bottom the Weaver's declaration that he is not a lion, but only the scenical representation of a lion. What new idea is gained by this title but one subversive of all credit—which the tale should force upon us—of its truth?" Coleridge himself never delivered a criticism more astute and to the point than this; and this second title, "A

Poet's Reverie," disappeared from all succeeding editions.

Unquestionably the only sound principle of arranging the letters of such a correspondent as Lamb is the chronological. For thus, as we read on, we are in fact reading an autobiography, embellished with a thousand anecdotes, confidences, and touches of character and feeling that would never have seen the light in an autobiography written intentionally for publication. But there is an interest also in noting, as I have pointed out, the different veins of thought and style that run through the letters addressed to different friends. The letters to Coleridge have a character of their own; and so with those to Manning and to Bernard Barton. These three groups of letters are the most remarkable in the collection. To the general reader, Manning and Barton are perhaps best known through their friendship with Lamb, although both, in their widely different ways, were noticeable men. Thomas Manning, indeed, until the publication ten years since of his *Journals of Travel*, with a short memoir prefixed, was an almost unknown name to this generation except as Charles Lamb's correspondent, and the letters to him are so full of raillery and the wildest frolics of the imagination that it would be difficult to read Manning aright from them alone. But Manning was a remarkable man. The son of a Norfolk clergyman, with a strong turn for both mathematics

and metaphysics, he went up to Caius College, Cambridge, and would have taken the highest mathematical honours but for an invincible objection to degrees, with the oaths and tests then attached to them. He wrote divers mathematical treatises, and continued to reside at Cambridge, though without a degree, and while there became known to Lamb, who was visiting his old companion Charles Lloyd at that University. Lamb made Manning's acquaintance about the year 1800. The mingled simplicity and enthusiasm of the man—his abstruse studies and his eccentricities, the fact that his tastes (mathematical, metaphysical, and Oriental) were all so alien from Lamb's own, had evidently a strange fascination for him from the very first, and a correspondence sprang up which continued for many years. Such a character as Manning's drew out Lamb's finest qualities of humour and sympathy. It was not likeness but unlikeness in his friends that at once stimulated his fancy and warmed his heart towards them. He loved Manning and laughed at him. He confided to him his closest family and personal sorrows; and in the very same letter, perhaps, would bring the whole varied artillery of his fun to play upon his friend's hobbies.

When Lamb first knew Manning, the dominant passion of his life was already working irrepressibly in his breast—the desire to explore the then unknown mysteries of China and Tartary. The

plan he formed and carried out, with extraordinary pluck and perseverance, was to begin the study of the Chinese language in England, carry it on in Paris, under the tuition of a great French Orientalist, pass some years in Canton, and when he should have acquired the art of perfectly deporting himself as a Celestial, to make his way, with a confidential native servant, to the sacred capital of Thibet, the abode of the Grand Lama, the very fountainhead of Buddhism. This exploit, so difficult and so hazardous, Manning achieved. He went out to China in 1806, was in Canton till 1810, made his memorable journey to Lhasa in 1810-1811, returned to Canton, where he again resided for some years, and finally returned to England in 1818. In Lamb's letters we follow him through all his changes of abode—from his quiet rooms at Cambridge to his residence in Paris (which he had to leave suddenly when war broke out in 1803), and so to Canton. "I heard that you were going to China," Lamb writes in August 1801, "with a commission from the Wedgwoods to collect hints for their pottery, and to teach the Chinese *perspective*." Eighteen months later, Manning's schemes were taking more definite shape, for Lamb writes to him in Paris, in tones of serious alarm :—

MY DEAR MANNING—The general scope of your letter afforded no indications of insanity, but some particular points raised a scruple. For God's sake, don't think any more of "Independent Tartary." What are

you to do among such Ethiopians? Is there no lineal descendant of Prester John? Is the chair empty? Is the sword unswayed? Depend upon it, they'll never make you their king as long as any branch of that great stock is remaining. I tremble for your Christianity. Read Sir John Mandeville's travels to cure you, or come over to England. There is a Tartar-man now exhibiting at Exeter Change. Come and talk with him, and hear what he says first. Indeed, he is no very favourable specimen of his countrymen! But, perhaps, the best thing you can do is to *try* to get the idea out of your head. For this purpose, repeat to yourself every night, after you have said your prayers, the words, Independent Tartary, Independent Tartary, two or three times, and associate with them the *idea* of *oblivion* ('tis Hartley's method with obstinate memories), or say, Independent, Independent, have I not already got an *independence*? That was a clever way of the old Puritans, pun-divinity. My dear friend, think what a sad pity it would be to bury such *parts* in heathen countries among nasty, unconversable, horse-belching, Tartar people! Some say they are cannibals; and then, conceive a Tartar fellow *eating* my friend, and adding the *cool malignity* of mustard and vinegar! I am afraid 'tis the reading of Chaucer has misled you; his foolish stories about Cambuscan, and the ring and the horse of brass. Believe me, there are no such things—'tis all the poet's invention. . . . The Tartars, really, are a cold, insipid, smouchy set. You'll be sadly moped (if you are not eaten) among them.

He returns to this grim warning at the end of his letter. "Have a care, my dear friend, of Anthropophagi! their stomachs are always craving. 'Tis terrible to be weighed out at

fivepence a pound; to sit at table (the reverse of fishes in Holland), not as a guest, but as a meat." In later years at some party, when we may suppose Manning or his travels were the subject of conversation, Lamb emphatically maintained that, by the showing of their very names, the *Manchew* Tartars were unquestionably cannibals.

By 1806 Manning is fairly settled among the English community at Canton, and on December 5th Lamb acknowledges his friend's first letter. "Manning, your letter dated 'Hottentots, August the what-was-it?' came to hand. China, Canton —bless us!—how it strains the imagination, and makes it ache!" And then he proceeds to tell his friend all the news of Holcroft's new play that had failed, and his own play in preparation, "Mr. H." that was to fail also, alas! though the poor fellow is so sanguine about it. "The story is a coxcomb appearing at Bath vastly rich—all the ladies dying for him—all bursting to know who he is—but he goes by no other name than *Mr. H.* . . . and only think how hard upon me it is that the ship is despatched to-morrow, and my triumph cannot be ascertained till the Wednesday after; but all China will ring of it by and by." It took a long time eighty years ago for letters to travel between England and Canton, and it was not till February 1808, more than a year afterwards, that Lamb is able to tell his friend how his hopes had been dashed. "I suppose you know my farce was damned. The

noise still rings in my ears. Were you ever in the pillory?—being damned is something like that." And then he tells what other literary irons are in the fire—*The Adventures of Ulysses*, "done out of the *Odyssey*—the *Shakspeare Tales* suggested the doing it," and another scheme, destined for a wider popularity and more wide-spreading results, "*Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary with Shakspeare.* Specimens are becoming fashionable. They used to be called 'Beauties.' You have seen *Beauties of Shakspeare*? So have many people that never saw any beauties *in* Shakspeare." The letter is a wonderful specimen of Lamb's volatile fancy. He reverts to the unfortunate fate of *Mr. H.*, and dilates on the frantic yells, "as from a congregation of wild geese," that sealed its doom: passes on into wildest enthusiasm over Braham's singing—"The little Jew has bewitched me. I follow him like as the boys follow Tom the Piper." Next come a few details of Manning's friends, which, he supposes, will interest his distant correspondent, and then, without a word of warning or apology for the abruptness of the departure: "I made a pun the other day, and palmed it upon Holcroft, who grinned like a Cheshire cat. (Why do cats grin in Cheshire? Because it was once a County Palatine—the cats cannot help laughing whenever they think of it—though I see no great joke in it.)"

Manning was absent from England twelve years—first at Canton, then on his perilous expedition to the capital of Thibet, and finally, after some further years in Canton, filling the post of Chinese interpreter to Lord Amherst's embassy at Pekin. Lamb's letters extend over this whole period, though with many gaps in the correspondence, often of several years. The distance apart, the long stretches of time, and the wide gulf that separated the pursuits and interests of the two friends, would have quenched, for most correspondents, the epistolary instinct. It worked the opposite effect upon Lamb. The very incongruity of their relative positions brought into play all his genius. And on Christmas Day, 1815, when the period of his friend's exile was nearing its end, he writes him the following wonderfully picturesque letter, worthy, indeed, of a place among the choicest essays of Elia. It was Manning, by the way, who, either in a letter or after his return to England, told Lamb the Chinese version of that myth as to the "origin of cooking," as old as Porphyry of Tyre, and probably to be found in the folk-lore of many other nations, which suggested the memorable "Essay on Roast Pig." Notice the string of monstrous fictions with which the letter ends, and yet the strange pathos and plausibility with which they are unfolded.

December 25, 1815.

DEAR OLD FRIEND AND ABSENTEE—This is Christmas day, 1815, with us: what it may be with you I don't know—the twelfth of June next year perhaps; and if it should be the consecrated season with you, I don't see how you can keep it. You have no turkeys; you would not desecrate the festival by offering up a withered Chinese bantam instead of the savoury, grand, Norfolkian holocaust that smokes all round my nostrils at this moment from a thousand firesides. Then, what puddings have you? Where will you get holly to stick in your churches, or churches to stick your dry tea-leaves (that must be the substitute) in? What memorials you can have of the holy time, I see not. A chopped missionary or two may keep up the thin idea of Lent and the wilderness; but what standing evidence have you of the Nativity? 'Tis our rosy-cheeked, home-stalled divines, whose faces shine to the tune of "Unto us a child is born," faces fragrant with the mince-pies of half a century, that alone can authenticate the cheerful mystery. I feel my bowels refreshed with the holy tide; my zeal is great against the unedified heathen. Down with pagodas, down with the idols, Ching-chong-fo and his foolish priesthood! Come out of Babylon, O my friend! for her time is come; and the child that is native, and the proselyte of her gates, shall kindle and smoke together! And in sober sense, what makes you so long from among us, Manning? You must not expect to see the same England again which you left.

Empires have been overturned, crowns trodden into dust, the face of the western world quite changed. Your friends have all got old. These you left blooming —myself (who am one of the few that remember you), these golden hairs, which you recollect my taking a

pride in, turned to silvery and grey. Mary has been dead and buried many years; she desired to be buried in the silk gown you sent her. Rickman, that you remember active and strong, now walks out supported by a servant-maid and a stick. Martin Burney is a very old man. The other day an aged woman knocked at my door and pretended my acquaintance. It was long before I had the most distant cognition of her; but at last, together, we made her out to be Louisa, the daughter of Mrs. Topham, formerly Mrs. Merton, who had been Mrs. Reynolds, formerly Mrs. Kenny, whose first husband was Holcroft, the dramatic writer of the last century. St. Paul's church is a heap of ruins; the Monument isn't half so high as you knew it, divers parts being successively taken down which the ravages of time had rendered dangerous; the horse at Charing Cross is gone, no one knows whither; and all this has taken place while you have been settling whether Ho-ting-tong should be spelt with a —, or a —. For aught I see you might almost as well remain where you are, and not come like a Struldbrug into a world where few were born when you went away. Scarce here and there one will be able to make out your face. All your opinions will be out of date, your jokes obsolete, your puns rejected with fastidiousness as wit of the last age. Your way of mathematics has already given way to a new method, which after all is, I believe, the old doctrine of Maclaurin, new vamped up with what he borrowed of the negative quantity of fluxions from Euler.

Poor Godwin! I was passing his tomb the other day in Cripplegate churchyard; there are some verses upon it written by Miss ——, which if I thought good enough I would send you. He was one of those who would have hailed your return not with boisterous shouts and clamours, but with the complacent gratulations of a

philosopher anxious to promote knowledge as leading to happiness; but his systems and his theories are ten feet deep in Cripplegate mould. Coleridge is just dead, having lived just long enough to close the eyes of Wordsworth, who paid the debt of nature but a week or two before. Poor Col., but two days before he died he wrote to a bookseller proposing an epic poem on the "Wanderings of Cain," in twenty-four books. It is said he has left behind him more than forty thousand treatises in criticisms, metaphysics, and divinity, but few of them in a state of completion. They are now destined, perhaps, to wrap up spices.

And after some further remonstrances he winds up with—

I suppose you heard that I have left the India House, and gone into the Fishmongers' Almshouses over the bridge. I have a little cabin there, small but homely, but you shall be welcome to it. You like oysters, and to open them yourself; I'll get you some if you come in oyster time. . . . Come as soon as you can.

C. LAMB.

If we sought among Lamb's correspondents for a contrast to Manning, the dabbler in strange philosophies and haunter of strange nations, we could not find one more effective than the Quaker-poet Bernard Barton, clerk for the last forty years of his life in the Messrs. Alexanders' Bank, in the quiet Suffolk town of Woodbridge. Lamb, doubtless made his acquaintance through the *London Magazine*, to which both were contributors. They had met, perhaps, at the table of the publishers,

Taylor and Hessey, who gave periodical dinners, at which their staff were gathered together. Lamb had made some foolish jest about the incongruity of Quakers writing poetry. Barton had been a little hurt, and had remonstrated; and Lamb's first letter (dated 11th September 1822) is a frank explanation that it was only "one of his levities," and that he had referred rather to what the Community of Friends might say on the subject. The letter ends—

> In feelings and matters not dogmatical, I hope I am half a Quaker.
>
> Believe me, with great respect,
>
> Yours,
>
> C. LAMB.

Readers of *Elia* know well that Lamb spoke seriously here. He loved the Quakers, and has devoted one of the tenderest of his essays to their praise. And out of this misunderstanding at the outset there sprang a deep liking between these two, and the letters to Barton are among the most delightful and characteristic. There was something analogous in the situations of the pair. Each was chained to the desk for the best part of each working-day, and each found in literature his happiest refuge. Barton published his frequent volumes of verse, graceful and tender always, and often displaying a real "Doric delicacy," and sent them as they appeared to Lamb, who praises, or criticises, with the same happy discrimination that

marks all his judgments. Then Barton and his young daughter and only child, Lucy, came to London and called on Lamb at Colebrook Row, where the New River ran past his door; and Lucy Barton, happily still surviving, told me only the other day how well she recalls entering the house by the door that opened straight from the open air into the parlour, and finding Elia deep in one of his folios by the fireside. It was in her album, you remember, that Lamb wrote the charming lines:

Little book, surnamed of *white*,
Clean as yet, and fair to sight,
Keep thy attribution right.

Never disproportioned scrawl,
Ugly blot (that's worse than all),
On thy maiden clearness fall!

In each letter here designed
Let the reader emblem'd find
Neatness of the owner's mind.

Gilded margins count a sin;
Let thy leaves attraction win
By the golden rules within:

Sayings fetched from sages old:
Laws which Holy Writ unfold,
Worthy to be graved in gold:

Lighter fancies not excluding:
Blameless wit, with nothing rude in,
Sometimes mildly interluding

Amid strains of graver measure:
Virtue's self hath oft her pleasure
In sweet Muses' groves of leisure.

Riddles dark, perplexing sense:
Darker meanings of offence:
What but *shades*—be banished hence.

Whitest thoughts in whitest dress,
Candid meanings, best express
Mind of quiet Quakeress.

These letters are rich in sterling sense, as well as poetic gossip and friendly badinage. Barton at one time was tempted, as so many have been and will be again, to leave the "drudgery of the desk's dead wood" and betake himself to literature as a livelihood.

Throw yourself on the world (cries Lamb) without any rational plan of support, beyond what the chance employ of booksellers would afford you!!! Throw yourself rather, my dear sir, from the steep Tarpeian rock, slap-dash headlong upon iron spikes. If you had but five consolatory minutes between the desk and the bed, make much of them, and live a century in them, rather than turn slave to the booksellers. . . . Keep to the bank, and the bank will keep you. . . . I bless every star that Providence, not seeing good to make me independent, has seen it next good to settle me upon the stable foundation of Leadenhall. Sit down, good B. B., in the banking office. What! is there not from six to eleven P.M., six days in the week, and is there not all Sunday? Fie, what a superfluity of man's time, if you could but think so!—enough for relaxation, mirth, converse, poetry, good thoughts, quiet thoughts. O the

corroding, torturing, tormenting thoughts that disturb the brain of the unlucky wight who must draw upon it for daily sustenance! Henceforth I retract all my fond complaints of mercantile employment: look upon them as lovers' quarrels. I was but half in earnest. Welcome dead timber of a desk that makes me live!

Bernard Barton took his friend's advice, and doubtless lived to bless him again and again for it.

And what good things are to be gleaned up and down these letters? Take the amazing illustration that winds up his apology for his slovenly habits in the writing of them. It is in 1826, after he had left the India House on his pension:—

DEAR B. B.—You may know my letters by the paper and the folding. For the former, I live on scraps obtained in charity from an old friend, whose stationery is a permanent perquisite: for folding, I shall do it neatly when I learn to tye my neckcloths. I surprise most of my friends by writing to them on ruled paper, as if I had not got past pot-hooks and hangers. Sealing-wax I have none on my establishment: wafers of the coarsest bran supply its place. . . . All the time I was at the E. India House I never mended a pen; I now cut 'em to the stumps, marring rather than mending the primitive goose-quill. I cannot bear to pay for articles I used to get for nothing. When Adam laid out his first penny upon *nonpareils* at some stall in Mesopotamos, I think it went hard with him, reflecting upon his old goodly orchard, where he had so many for nothing.

Or take the solemn apostrophe to his friend,

written on the day after the execution of the famous banker and forger Fauntleroy (30th November 1824).

Now, my dear sir, trifling apart, the gloomy catastrophe of yesterday morning prompts a sadder vein. The fate of the unfortunate Fauntleroy makes me, whether I will or no, to cast reflecting eyes around on such of my friends as, by a parity of situation, are exposed to a similarity of temptation. My very style seems to myself to become more impressive than usual, with the change of theme. Who that standeth, knoweth but he may yet fall? Your hands as yet, I am most willing to believe, have never deviated into others' property. You think it impossible that you could ever commit so heinous an offence: but so thought Fauntleroy once; so have thought many besides him, who at last have expiated as he hath done. You are as yet upright; but you are a banker—at least the next thing to it. I feel the delicacy of the subject; but cash must pass through your hands, sometimes to a great amount. If in an unguarded hour—but I will hope better. Consider the scandal it will bring upon those of your persuasion. Thousands would go to see a Quaker hanged, that would be indifferent to the fate of a Presbyterian or an Anabaptist. Think of the effect it would have on the sale of your poems alone, not to mention higher considerations!

Lamb's letters need a commentary, for they are full of allusiveness, and full of references to persons and books and incidents of his time not of sufficient importance to have escaped oblivion on their own merits, but fully deserving a word of record in explanation of Lamb's use of them.

We read in a letter to Barton: "The *Prometheus Unbound* is a capital story. The literal rogue!" And it is pleasant to know on authority happily still living, that Barton's neighbour, the Rev. John Mitford, had written to a country bookseller to get him Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, and had received, after a week or two, the reply that they were sorry they could not obtain the book *in sheets*. Moreover, as it is impossible for us to keep all good poetry that has ever been written in our memories, we may be excused for asking explanation even of such an allusion as the following. Lamb writes to Coleridge, in a letter undated, but probably 1819, for that unmethodical man too often did not date his letters, and thereby entailed grievous labour on his editors. Coleridge had sent his old friend a new sonnet of his own, apparently copied on some very flimsy paper which had torn in the transit, and Lamb replies:

> DEAR C.—Your sonnet is capital. The paper ingenious, only that it split into four parts in the carriage. I have transferred it to the common English paper, manufactured of rags, for better preservation. I never knew before how the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were written. 'Tis strikingly corroborated by observations on Cats. These domestic animals, put 'em on a rug before the fire, wink their eyes up, and listen to the kettle and then *purr*, which is *their* poetry.

We may, as I have said, remember the "Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel"; but may not at once appreciate the reference to the magnificent sonnet,

then just written, and soon to be published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, entitled "Fancy in Nubibus: or the Poet in the Clouds," a sonnet composed on the sea-coast. You will not mind, I think, hearing it again.

O! it is pleasant, with a heart at ease,
Just after sunset, or by moonlight skies,
To make the shifting clouds be what you please,
Or let the easily persuaded eyes
Own each quaint likeness issuing from the mould
Of a *friend's* fancy; or with head bent low
And cheek aslant see rivers flow of gold
'Twixt crimson banks; and then, a traveller, go
From mount to mount through Cloudland, gorgeous land!
Or, listening to the tide with closed sight,
Be that blind bard, who on the Chian strand
By those deep sounds possessed with inward light,
Beheld the *Iliad* and the *Odyssee*
Rise to the swelling of the voiceful sea.

I would fain, if only time were consenting, read you many passages of acutest criticism and sterling moral judgments, scattered through these letters. In most matters of artistic taste he was ahead of his age, and often in ethical questions also. For instance, in the year 1824, William Blake, painter and poet, was known to those of the general public who knew his name at all, chiefly as a harmless lunatic, who saw visions. When James Montgomery, of Sheffield, edited the *Chimney-Sweepers' Friend and Climbing-Boys' Album*, in which he pleaded the cause of the poor little suffering lads, and invited Lamb to contribute

something to the volume, Lamb did not find the subject inspiring to his own Muse, but in order not to withhold his name altogether, sent Montgomery Blake's now well-known lines on the chimney-sweeper:

> When my mother died I was very young
> And my father sold me while yet my tongue
> Could scarcely cry Weep! weep! weep! weep.
> So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

They accordingly appear in Montgomery's little volume as "communicated by Mr. Charles Lamb from a very rare and curious little work." This rare and curious work was, of course, the *Songs of Innocence*, which had been written and illustrated by Blake seven-and-thirty years before. Yet so little known was it that when Bernard Barton, who himself contributed to the *Album*, and was moreover a man of wide reading, came upon these lines of Blake's, he was like Keats' astronomer "when a new planet swims into his ken," and wrote off to Lamb, full of enthusiasm, to know if Blake was a "real name." Lamb returns for answer: "Blake is a real name, I assure you, and a most extraordinary man if he is still living." This was in 1824, and Blake was then passing slowly towards his grave, poor but uncomplaining. He died in 1827. Even Lamb did not know his Christian name, for he proceeds: "He is the Robert Blake whose wild designs accompany a splendid folio edition of the *Night Thoughts*,

which you may have seen. . . . His poems have been sold hitherto only in manuscript." Lamb meant, I suppose, that the verses were not printed in the usual way, but engraved by Blake on the same plates as the illustrations, and were therefore necessarily limited in number and costly to buy. "I never read them, but a friend, at my desire, procured the Sweep song. There is one to a tiger, which I have heard recited, beginning

> Tiger, tiger, burning bright
> Thro' the deserts of the night,

which is glorious; but alas! I have not the book, for the man is flown—whither I know not—to Hades, or a madhouse. But I must look on him as one of the most extraordinary persons of the age."

There was another painter of that period whom the public reckoned one of the "most extraordinary persons of the age," but whom Lamb had no liking for. This was John Martin, the designer of "Belshazzar's Feast," and "Joshua Staying the Sun," and other subjects of a grandiose kind, engravings of which may still be found, I think, hanging in the best parlour of many a country home. But the whirligig of time, and the spread of art-education, have brought the world round to Lamb's point of view. How he hits the nail on the head, when he tells Barton—

Martin's "Belshazzar" I have seen. Its architectural effect is stupendous, but the human figures, the squall-

ing, contorted little antics that are playing at being frightened, like children at a sham ghost, who half know it to be a mask, are detestable. Then the letters are nothing more than a transparency lighted up, such as a lord might order to be lit up on a sudden at a Christmas gambol, to scare the ladies. The *type* is as plain as Baskerville's—they should have been dim, full of mystery, letters to the mind rather than to the eye. . . . Just such a confused piece is his "Joshua," frittered into a thousand fragments, little armies here, little armies there—you should see only the *Sun* and *Joshua*. If I remember he has not left out that luminary entirely, but for Joshua, I was ten minutes finding him out.

What noble common-sense appears in such criticism as this, and I think the term not unfitly describes Lamb's criticism generally, even in matters more serious and important than pictures and poems. Strange that this jester, this book-man, this too often flippant handler of themes which pious men shrink from touching, yet so often sees farther than his contemporaries into the moral heart of things. A testimonial was actually proposed, in 1828, in honour of Thomas Clarkson, and it was to take the form of a monument to be erected on the road between Cambridge and London, on the precise spot where the great philanthropist first stopped to rest, and formed the resolution of devoting his life to the abolition of the slave-trade. Basil Montagu's wife writes to Lamb for a subscription, which Lamb sends, but with these words of com-

ment, surely deserving to be printed in letters of gold :—

DEAR MADAM—I return your list with my name. I should be sorry that any respect should be going on towards Clarkson, and I be left out of the conspiracy. Otherwise I frankly own that to pillarise a man's good feelings in his lifetime is not to my taste. Monuments to goodness, even after death, are equivocal. I turn away from Howard's, I scarce know why. Goodness blows no trumpet, nor desires to have it blown. *We should be modest for a modest man*—as he is for himself. The vanities of life—art, poetry, skill military—are subjects for trophies; not the silent thoughts arising in a good man's mind in lonely places.

We have modulated, you see, into a more serious key, but it is one just as characteristic of Lamb's individuality as any we have touched on this evening. Common repute sets him down as a humourist, and often enough a reckless one. The world remembers him as a Yorick, with his "jibes, his gambols, and his flashes of merriment." He made many enemies by these things, uttered in season and out of season, in his lifetime, and I daresay they offend many grave persons still. But the flippancies of a man of genius are rarely without some flavour of that genius. When Lamb was travelling once in a stage-coach, with evident marks on him of an influenza, and a fellow-traveller remarked sympathetically, "You have a very bad cold, sir," Lamb replied, "Well, it's the *b-b-best* I've got." I daresay that old

gentleman went home and related how he had met a very odd man—all but uncivil indeed—in the coach. Thomas Carlyle, as he recorded, thought Lamb very "ill-mannered," and no wonder, if the story be true of what took place on the occasion of one of those visits to Lamb at Enfield. Carlyle was watching the movements of a flock of pigeons with some curiosity, and Lamb inquired (we can imagine with what gravity): "Mr. Carlyle, are you a p-p-p-poulterer?" But I think this flow of "cockney wit," "diluted insanity," or what not, was one of Lamb's safety-valves under the pressure of his anxious life. As we listen to these witty and amusing letters, we might easily forget how lonely was the "lonely hearth" from which for the nine years after he retired from the India House they were written. Too often at the end of some whimsical romance, or some penetrating piece of criticism, we come upon saddest confidences as to domestic trials. The earlier letters often end with "Mary sends love," or "Adieu, with both our loves," and then we know that all was well with the pair. But as time goes on such postscripts become rarer, and we have instead, "Dear Moxon, I have brought my sister to Enfield, being sure that she had no hope of recovery in London. Her state of mind is deplorable beyond any example." Or to Bernard Barton: "Dear B. B., your handwriting has conveyed much pleasure to me in respect of Lucy's restoration. Would I could send you as good news of *my* poor Lucy!

But some wearisome weeks I must remain lonely yet." And again to Wordsworth: "Your letter, save in what respects your dear sister's health, cheered me in my new solitude. Mary is ill again. Her illnesses encroach yearly. The last was three months, followed by two of depression most dreadful. I look back upon her earlier attacks with longing. Nice little durations of six weeks or so, followed by complete restoration —shocking as they were to me then. In short, half her life she is dead to me, the other half is made anxious with fears and lookings forward to the next shock." "*One*," he says most pathetically in another letter, "*one* does not make a household." But that lonely figure had to constitute Lamb's household, with exceptions fewer and fewer, till the end came; and we feel that those who then loved him best could hardly have wished that end long deferred.

What constitutes the abiding fascination of Lamb's personality? *Not* his funny sayings—let the "funny man" of every generation lay this well to heart. His humour? Yes—for his humour was part and parcel of his character. It is character that makes men loved. It was the rare combination in Lamb of strength and weakness. He was "a hero, with a failing." His heroism was greater than many of us could hope to show. Charity, in him, most assuredly fulfilled the well-known definition. It suffered long and was kind; it thought no evil; and it never vaunted

itself nor was puffed up. And as we watch its daily manifestations, never asking for the world's recognition, never thinking it had done enough, or could do enough, for its beloved object, we may well reckon it large enough to cover a greater multitude of frailties than those we are able to detect in the life of Charles Lamb.

HOW I TRACED CHARLES LAMB IN HERTFORDSHIRE

SINCE the day, in 1882, when I published my first memoir of Lamb in the "Men of Letters" Series, I have had many invitations to speak of him. But, especially after editing Lamb's writings, with the many prefaces and notes thereto appropriate, I have always felt and pleaded that, for better or worse, I had said my say about Lamb, and that those who loved that most lovable of writers knew by this time all that I thought and felt about him, and that in a lecture I should be only going over old ground. But when this latest application came to me, made in the most flattering terms, I bethought me of one very interesting day in my life, connected with the work which Mr. John Morley first encouraged me to undertake for the Series he edited—a day, the details of which I had never yet imparted in print or in lecture—the day on which I first visited that village and its surroundings in "pleasant Hertfordshire" with which Lamb's childhood, and indeed his youth

and early manhood, were so closely bound up—and, visiting them, was thrown into most unexpected touch with persons not remotely connected with Lamb's early history. Now there are many characters in literature concerning whom I should hesitate to confess my enthusiasm for such details as I am going to communicate this evening. But it is otherwise with Charles Lamb. In the first place, you invited me to speak about him, and this in itself tells me that there is an audience in this neighbourhood interested to hear even something more about him than I have necessarily supplied in annotating his works. In the next place, I have noticed (and it is an almost unique bond uniting the readers of Charles Lamb) that those who love him do not love him (as the saying goes) "by halves," but are content to be fanatical in their attachment, and not to be ashamed of it! And in that light I propose to regard you this evening—as sharers in this fanaticism with myself—so that I shall not fear your scorn at the end for having been a "chronicler" of too "small beer"; or your contemptuous criticism that "little things are great to little men." What I *may* indeed feel that I have to fear is a charge of egotism; for, from the nature of the case, I shall have to tell you a good deal about myself. But I know I shall have, in any case, your kind indulgence.

When first I was asked to contribute the

volume on Lamb to the "Men of Letters" Series, it was because (I may be allowed to say) that writer was known to be a favourite of mine, and that the labour would indeed be a labour of love. I had indeed read and delighted in him from my childhood almost, long before, of course, I could appreciate a tithe of his humour and his critical power. When I thus became intimate with him, the sole guide and clue to his career and character, apart from his own writings, was in the well-known *Memoirs* by Talfourd, the *Life and Letters*, and the *Final Memorials* that followed. And when I had undertaken the task of telling Lamb's story afresh, it became my duty to endeavour to supplement Talfourd's work by any and every fresh light that I could discover upon portions of Lamb's history which Talfourd had passed lightly over. And such portions belonged to the childhood and youth of Lamb. From the time he came of age his history is told for us by himself—in his letters and in his essays—with a fulness that leaves little for the acute reader to seek elsewhere. I say advisedly the *acute* reader, for Lamb's love of practical joking and of gratuitous mystification have often put the seeker upon wrong scents. The first anxiety, then, that I had was to arrive at facts about Lamb's earlier years, and especially his connection with Hertfordshire. As to his school days—at Christ's Hospital—he has himself, in

two famous essays, told us everything; but as to his holiday seasons, which he spent with his grandmother in the country; as to the country-house which he denominated "Blakesmoor"; as to the allusions scattered through his writings to a certain fair-haired maid whom he had loved in those youthful days—loved, but failed to win—over all this there hung a mist of uncertainty and perplexity which Talfourd had not the will or the means to disperse. Doubtless he had not the means; for when he made Lamb's acquaintance he was young, and Lamb was not one who cared to discuss with his friends a past that was to him full of sorrows. Hence one looks in vain in Talfourd's pages for any definite information about the incidents of Lamb's life, or about his family relationships, other than those which were to be found in letters and essays. He tells us indeed that Lamb's grandmother was housekeeper to the Plumers in Hertfordshire, but does not mention where the house was; he mentions briefly "a youthful passion" of Lamb's which inspired a few sonnets of delicate feeling, but that is all. To find out if possible, therefore, something more about Lamb in Hertfordshire became my immediate duty.

Now if Talfourd had been the only available source of information, it is likely that I might have followed up the clues he supplies very quickly, and to a successful issue. The family of the Plumers, the name Blakesmoor, any

County History, you will well remark, would have at once enlightened me, especially as Lamb, in an exquisite passage of a letter to Bernard Barton, writes: "You have well described your old-fashioned paternal hall. Is it not odd that every one's recollections are of some such place? I had my Blakesware (*Blakesmoor* in the *London*)." That is to say, he had called it by the other slightly altered name in his well-known essay in the *London Magazine*. Here, surely, you will say, the clue was actually placed in my hands—how could I fail at once to follow it up? Well, I had my excuse. Many years after Talfourd's *Memoirs*, in 1854, a certain Mr. P. G. Patmore, father of the well-known poet of the *Angel in the House*, published some volumes of Recollections entitled *Persons I have Known*. Among these was Charles Lamb, and also a certain Mr. Ward, who had married the widow of Mr. Plumer of Hertfordshire and taken her name, becoming Mr. Plumer Ward. Mr. and Mrs. Plumer Ward resided at Gilston, another seat of the Plumers in the same county; and in his essay on Mr. Plumer Ward, Patmore first informed the world that this later residence of the Plumers was where the family lived in Lamb's childhood, and where his grandmother was so long housekeeper. "Blakesmoor" was, in fact (according to Mr. Patmore), Gilston, and he proceeded to enumerate all those features of the house described by Lamb in his essay: the

"Marble Hall," the "Twelve Cæsars," and the rest, as interesting confirmation still existing of the beautiful essay and of Lamb's childish recollections; the simple fact being that all these things had been removed, some thirty years before Patmore wrote, from the other, earlier, abode of the Plumer family. Patmore was himself, of course, led astray by these apparent coincidences.

Time went on; I am not aware that Patmore's account was anywhere challenged. Other editors of Lamb followed, and adopted his version of matters without a doubt—one of them, indeed, furnishing his pages with a wood-cut of the Gilston house. And, justified by this accumulation of authority, I proceeded at first to follow suit. This was my excuse—I cannot plead *justification*—I ought not to have been content with second-hand evidence. You have heard the instructive story of the famous Dr. Routh, President of Magdalen College, Oxford, who lived to within a few months of completing his hundredth year. When a very old man, already in the nineties, a young and enthusiastic Oxford student was allowed to converse with him, and at parting asked, with much diffidence, what he (the President)—so old a man—would select from his vast experience as the *one maxim* above all others to be taken to heart by a young man starting on his career. The old scholar did not hesitate a moment. "Always verify your

references," he replied; which is as much as to say, "Never take evidence except at first hand." And it is, though ethically less valuable, of first-rate importance to the scholar, in whatever field he is engaged. Well, I had neglected this sound advice. I wrote my early chapters of the *Memoir of Lamb*, and happily I placed them, for correction or suggestion, in the hands of a wise friend—the late Mr. E. J. Davis, standing counsel to the police, a criminal lawyer of eminence, and a true antiquary and scholar. He returned them to me with the query, "Are you *sure* you are right about Lamb and Gilston? Turn to the article on Ware in Mr. Murray's handbook *Twenty Miles round London*, which I send herewith for your acceptance." I turned to the indicated page, and read as follows. After mentioning other gentlemen's seats near Ware, the writer proceeds:—

> The manor-house of Blakesware—the seat of the Featherstones, Leventhorpes, Clutterbucks, and Plumers—has won a lasting place in our literature. It is the *Blakesmoor Hall* of Charles Lamb's delightful essay, "Blakesmoor in Hertfordshire." Of the fine old mansion, which stood directly opposite the road from the neighbouring village of Widford, not a vestige is left. It was pulled down in 1822 by Mrs. Plumer, then lady of the manor. Close by it stood the cottage in which dwelt Lamb's Rosamund Gray. This too has been swept away.

This was startling, and I resolved that this

time, at all events, I would "verify my references." I daresay we have all noticed that as soon as a bit of unexpected information on a subject has come from any quarter, other supporting evidence is sure, as if by mere chance, quickly to follow. The mention of the village of Widford reminded me that the father of the late Archbishop Whately of Dublin was rector of that parish, and I turned in haste to the Memoir of the archbishop by his daughter, and lo! she told the same story of Blakesware being adjacent, and of its being the home of Lamb's grandam. And lastly, happening to mention my approaching visit to the place to a clergyman friend at Enfield, "Oh!" he said, "the rector of Widford was an old curate of mine, and I will give you an introduction to him. I will write and tell him he may expect a call from you."

Here was a piece of luck! And I proceeded promptly to take advantage of it. My friend Davis and myself arranged for an early excursion to Ware, *en route* for Widford, a village some three or four miles distant. Though the persons Lamb knew there in his boyhood must have been long in their graves, surely (I thought) there would linger traditions of some worth among "oldest inhabitants" or the like. I wished, if possible, to find the actual name (if nothing else) of the blue-eyed, fair-haired girl—the "Anna" of the sonnets, the "Alice" of the essays. It was fairly well known among Lamb students that she

married and became a Mrs. Bartram, and that a daughter of hers married William Coulson, the eminent surgeon, who had died in 1877. And by inquiry among relations of the Coulsons, I had acquired one solitary fact, that Mrs. Bartram's Christian name was *Ann*. Furnished with these clues, I prepared for our day in the country.

It was a lovely day, in June or July 1881, that we arrived in Ware, and having ordered dinner on our return at the inn, chartered a conveyance and drove through the rural Hertfordshire landscape—so sweetly and characteristically English—and were deposited at the gate of the rectory, close adjoining the church. The rector was from home, but his wife and her sister gave us warmest welcome, and listened to my simple request that I might see the church and churchyard, and be informed of any facts or traditions as to Blakesware and the past inhabitants of the village. Mrs. Lockwood and her sister conferred a moment, and then one of them said, "I think Mr. Ainger might like to see Mrs. Tween!" Mrs. Tween!—I thought—what a strange name, and who can she be? I suppose I looked perplexed, and my kind hostesses went on to say that Mrs. Arthur Tween was a very elderly lady, who, with her husband, were old inhabitants of the village, and that Mrs. Tween in her youthful days had been very intimate with Charles and Mary Lamb. This was indeed an unhoped-for chance, because it was not even as if Lamb had

ever resided in the place—except in holiday seasons when a boy — and that was then approaching a century before. How should this be, I wondered, as we walked through the pleasant village street to the old-fashioned farm-house-looking abode of Mr. and Mrs. Tween. Passing through the homely garden, with its old-fashioned flowers—its stocks and sweet-williams and mignonette—to the front door, Mrs. Tween was soon before us, and my kind companion introduced us as gentlemen interested in her old friend Charles Lamb. I don't think (I regret to have to say it) that we were very welcome, or that Mrs. Tween greatly cared at her age—she must have been then nearer eighty than seventy —to be troubled with two entire strangers calling at the house to interview her, for "interviewing," happily, is less common in rural villages than in large cities. *O fortunatos agricolas*, we may indeed well exclaim. Mr. and Mrs. Tween have both, let me hasten to add, passed away from all knowledge of such things since the day I speak of, or I would not have run even the present risk of their hearing of my obligations to them. However, we were made outwardly welcome, and our guide from the rectory soon struck a responsive chord by telling that Mr. Ainger was connected with the Temple Church. From the moment that the word "Temple" was pronounced the ice was broken, and "indifference was no more." Mrs. Tween was herself, she

said, a native of the Temple, and it was there that her family's friendship with the Lambs had been cemented. Her father held some office in the Temple. "Might I ask," I interrupted, "what was his name?" "*Randal Norris.*" My friend Davis and myself looked at one another, like stout Cortez and his men in Keats's sonnet, "with a wild surmise, *silent*," not "upon a peak in Darien," but on our two fireside chairs in this country parlour. "Randal Norris"—and the whole pathetic story of the Lamb family and their great sorrow came flooding on my memory. And that saddest of sad letters sent by Charles to his school friend Coleridge after the fatal day at their little Queen Street lodging irresistibly prompted the quotation I uttered: "Mr. Norris has been as a father to me, Mrs. Norris as a mother"; and as I spoke the words I saw Mrs. Tween's eyes fill with tears, and I felt that we were no longer strangers.

And then, too, there rose before me the last sad scene in the Norris household, which, thirty years after the letter to Coleridge just cited, Lamb addressed to Crabb Robinson—

DEAR ROBINSON—I called upon you this morning and found that you were gone to visit a dying friend. I had been upon a like errand. Poor Norris has been lying dying for now almost a week—such is the penalty we pay for having enjoyed a strong constitution. . . . The group I saw about him I shall not forget. Upon the bed, or about it, were assembled his wife and two

daughters, and poor deaf Richard, his son, looking doubly stupefied. There they were, and seemed to have been sitting all the week. I could only reach out a hand to Mrs. Norris, speaking was impossible in that mute chamber. By this time I hope it is all over with him. In him I have a loss the world cannot make up. He was my friend and my father's friend all the life I can remember. I seem to have made foolish friendships ever since. *Those* are friendships which outlive a second generation. Old as I am waxing, in his eyes I was still the child he first knew me. To the last he called me "Charley." I have none to call me "Charley" now. He was the last link that bound me to the Temple.

And then follow the delightful details which every lover of Lamb will recall, of his poor friend's antiquarian research, extending to the profound criticism, after trying to make out a black-letter text of Chaucer in the Temple Library—"In these old books, Charley, there is sometimes a deal of very indifferent spelling." But at the close Lamb's tender heart turns again to the pressing needs of the family, and he tells how "the poor good girls will now have to receive their mother in an 'obscure village' in Hertfordshire, where they had been for some time struggling to make a school; and urges Robinson, if his influence extends so far, to lay the claims and necessities of these poor people before the Benchers of the Inner Temple." All this, and much more, came back to me now, with new meaning and interest; and here was I sitting,

five-and-fifty years later than the sad day described by Lamb, talking to one of those two brave women, and doubtless in the same "obscure village" to which they had turned as girls for shelter.

And so it proved, for in our conversation that followed Mrs. Tween made all clear. Her mother, it appeared, had been a native of Widford, and it was natural that they should all turn to the old scenes and associations, when the Temple was no longer a home. The two daughters established their little school, maintained it for some years —not, I think, unprosperously,—and had finally married two brothers, farmers, of the name of Tween. But through all these years Mrs. Tween's affection and loyalty to the Temple and all its interests had never wavered. And I had not failed to discover on this my first introduction to her that it was my connexion with the Temple, even more than my love for Charles and Mary Lamb, that first broke the ice between us, and opened all the springs of early recollection in the old lady. Who could wonder, for her father lay at rest in the Temple churchyard, and to her, doubtless, as to Lamb, the Temple was "the most elegant spot in the metropolis"; and, as with him also, its gardens, courts, its church and its river, were among her earliest and happiest memories. She never went up to London for the day, she said, without visiting it, changed as it must have been in almost every feature; and she still bought

many of her household necessaries from a shop facing it in Fleet Street, because there they had dealt when they were children. It was, indeed, with some difficulty that I could draw her away from the Temple and its memories to speak of the persons I was that day more nearly interested in. But we contrived it at last, and then I gathered how the close intimacy with Charles and Mary had continued until his death in 1834; how, when he was at Enfield, he often walked over, with Emma Isola sometimes, and spent the day or night; and she showed me, not without pride, the best bedroom, in which he had slept. And then I asked about Blakesware, and about Mrs. Field, his grandmother. "Oh yes, she died at Blakesware, and was buried in Widford churchyard, and you shall see her grave, not far from the church door." And as to Blakesware itself, the old house was pulled down some time about the year 1822, and of late years a fine new house had been built on higher ground a few hundred yards away, and the site of the old house was now only marked by a young plantation of trees in an enclosure. And now, last, not least, could Mrs. Tween give me any information as to the name of the girl who, it was impossible to doubt, in the midst of all Lamb's mystifications and changes of appellation, must have actually won his boyish heart during his visits to the "Grandam" at the old Dower House of the Plumers? Mrs. Field, as I discovered when later in the day I stood

before her grave, died in 1792, when Charles was only seventeen, and the attachment must have begun thus early, when, as his earliest sonnets tell us (and it would seem as if love had first made him a poet), he

> . . . roved those winding wood-walks green,
> Green winding walks and shady pathways sweet.

Lamb calls her the "fair-haired maid," and three times over calls her *Anna*, a fact which had always impressed me, although in later years, when writing obviously of the same episode in his life (one, I believe, that coloured his whole character and genius while that life lasted), he chose to disguise her as "Alice" and "Alice W." Who present will not recall that loveliest and most affecting of his essays, "wrung from him" when the last tie but one had snapped that bound him to his own family?

Then I told how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W.; and as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial meant in maidens—when suddenly turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of re-presentment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding, till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely

impressed upon me the effects of speech: "We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartram father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence and a name"—and immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor arm-chair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side, but John L. (or James Elia) was gone for ever.

"The children of Alice call Bartram father." As I have hinted to-day, and elsewhere, it had been generally understood that the husband's name was here given without disguise, and starting from that as true, I had been occupied in trying to learn more about the fair-haired maid. Mrs. Tween could not have known her in her youth at all events, but Randal Norris's wife must have been contemporary. Could Mrs. Tween tell me anything? Did she actually live in Widford, and what was her name? Yes; she lived very near Blakesware, and cottages still stood on the site of her dwelling, though they had been probably rebuilt, and contained no traces of their predecessors. And her name—oh, her name was "Nancy Simmons." "*Nancy!*" I cried, for I felt I was losing the one *fact* I had ascertained about Mrs. Bartram; "I had thought it was 'Ann'!" "Certainly," replied my informant, "'Ann,' but she was always called 'Nancy'" (I had forgotten for what "Nancy" was really the affectionate and

familiar alternative). "Ann Simmons" then had been the Anna, the Alice, with the watchet-eyes and the "yellow Hertfordshire hair." But of her and her fortunes Mrs. Tween had little or nothing else to tell. She lived with her mother at the cottage called by the strange name of "Blenheims"; but how, or why, Lamb's boyish passion was unrequited—whether his poverty or the taint of insanity in the family proved the fatal obstacle—Mrs. Tween could not tell me. There had been two daughters, I learned, in the family—Maria and Ann. The latter, Lamb's early love, had married Mr. Bartram, a silversmith, of Princes Street, Soho. By him she had had three daughters and a son, and of these (so that my inquiries had thus far not been misled) the second daughter, Maria, had married William Coulson, the eminent surgeon. These latter were both dead—one in 1876 and the other in the year following—and unless any traditions should be surviving in the families of other descendants of Mrs. Simmons of Widford, there would never be more known of the course of Charles Lamb's early and most true love.

Then Mrs. Tween produced her Lamb relics. I was then, remember, in the early stages of my investigations, and my own possessions in this kind were as yet few. Of letters from Charles, unfortunately, she had none, but several from Mary. A few early editions of Lamb's books—gifts from the writer or his sister—stood on the book-shelves in the best parlour—the two 1818

volumes and others, and, eclipsing all else in value, *two* (actually *two!*) copies of the excessively scarce *Poetry for Children*—in those days believed by collectors to be almost extinct, though other copies have turned up since. You will believe the (I fear) unrighteous envy, the *sacra fames* of the collector, with which I examined these precious volumes; and you will stand (I hope) amazed at my moderation when I tell you that I could not *dare* (seeing how she loved them) to offer to become their purchaser for dross! And then followed treasures (*curiosities* only, you will perhaps call them) of a generation farther back than Lamb. You will all remember, in the "Old Benchers of the Inner Temple," the incomparable episode in which Lamb describes his own father, clerk and confidential servant of Samuel Salt, under the name of "Lovel":—

I knew this Lovel. He was a man of an incorrigible and losing honesty. A good fellow withal, and "would strike." In the cause of the oppressed he never considered inequalities, or calculated the number of his opponents. He once wrested a sword out of the hand of a man of quality that had drawn upon him, and pommelled him severely with the hilt of it. The swordsman had offered insult to a female—an occasion upon which no odds against him could have prevented the interference of Lovel. He would stand next day bareheaded to the same person modestly to excuse his interference—for L. never forgot rank where something better was not concerned. L. was the liveliest little fellow breathing,

had a face as gay as Garrick's, whom he was said greatly to resemble (I have a portrait of him which confirms it), possessed a fine turn for humorous poetry —next to Swift and Prior—moulded heads in clay or plaster of Paris to admiration, by the dint of natural genius merely; turned cribbage boards, and such small cabinet toys, to perfection; took a hand at quadrille or bowls with equal facility; made punch better than any man of his degree in England; had the merriest quips and conceits; and was altogether as brimful of rogueries and inventions as you could desire. He was a brother of the angle, moreover, and just such a free, hearty, honest companion as Mr. Izaak Walton would have chosen to go a-fishing with. I saw him in his old age and the decay of his faculties, palsy-smitten, in the last sad stage of human weakness—"a remnant most forlorn of what he was"—yet even then his eye would light up upon the mention of his favourite Garrick. He was greatest, he would say, in Bayes—"was upon the stage nearly throughout the whole performance, and as busy as a bee." At intervals, too, he would speak of his former life, and how he came up a little boy from Lincoln, to go to service, and how his mother cried at parting with him, and how he returned, after some few years' absence, in his smart new livery, to see her, and she blest herself at the change, and could hardly be brought to believe that it was "her own bairn." And then, the excitement subsiding, he would weep, till I have wished that sad second-childhood might have a mother still to lay its head upon her lap. But the common mother of us all in no long time after received him gently into hers.

"Possessed a fine turn for humorous poetry —next to Swift and Prior"—writes Charles, and readers of Talfourd's first *Memoir* may recall

how he just refers to the modest efforts of John Lamb the elder in this direction :—

> He was not without literary ambition (writes Talfourd), and having written some occasional verses to grace the festivities of a Benefit Society of which he was a member, was encouraged by his brother members to publish, in a thin quarto, *Poetical Pieces on Several Occasions*. This volume contains a lively picture of the life of a lady's footman of the last century ; the "History of Joseph," told in well-measured heroic couplets ; and a pleasant piece after the manner of Gay's *Fables*, entitled the "Sparrow's Wedding," which was the author's favourite, and which, when he fell into the dotage of age, he delighted to hear Charles read.

Little did I expect to find that a copy of the "thin quarto," in homely ink on still homelier paper, was still in existence ; but Mrs. Tween had three copies, or rather the *remains* of three, for two copies were all but destroyed by the ravages of the bookworm (the entomological, not the human sort!) ; but one was practically uninjured, and there I read with my own eyes the productions of this modest muse, not without interest as exhibiting the eight-syllabled couplet, as Charles truly called it—the couplet of Swift and Prior—and pointing to Charles's own early introduction to the metre of his favourite Wither. Here too, besides some occasional pieces not rising above merest doggerel, were little touches of domestic pathos, deriving for us a yet keener pathos from the fact that we know something

of the after-career of the persons named. For here were the verses, "A Letter from a Child to its Grandmother," a short epistle in verse written for the son, John Lamb the younger, to send to his old grandmother, Mrs. Field, at Blakesware; and here was I reading it in its original form, and in the very village where that good old woman had lived and died.

Dear Grandam,—
Pray to God to bless
Your grandson dear, with happiness;
That as I do advance each year,
I may be taught my God to fear;
My little frame from passion free
To man's estate from infancy;
From vice that turns a youth aside,
And to have wisdom for my guide;
That I may neither lie nor swear,
But in the path of virtue steer;
My actions generous, firm, and just,
Be always faithful to my trust;
And thee the Lord will ever bless.
Your grandson dear,
JOHN L——, the LESS.

How doubly pathetic, when we read these lines in the light of that subsequent history which Charles, in essay and letter, has made known to us! How sad a commentary on Wordsworth's "The child is father of the man," when we think of the elder brother who grew up to a selfish manhood, with his comfortable berth in the South Sea House, and leaving his noble

and unselfish brother to bear all the burdens and make all the sacrifices of that stricken home!

It is pleasanter to turn to the other and alike unsuspected relic of the family in Mrs. Tween's possession. "Moulded heads in clay or plaster of Paris to admiration, by the dint of natural genius merely"; and there, above Mrs. Tween's parlour chimney-piece, hung, in a quaint coeval frame, a head and bust of Samuel Salt, the old Bencher, John Lamb's employer, done in some unknown composition (I *think*, neither "wax" nor "plaster of Paris") by the faithful clerk and servant, and given by that same servant, or his children, to the Norris family. It was with no "evil eye" of envy (I hope you will believe) that I gazed upon these curious survivals, these unsuspected commentaries upon Elia, and wondered what would become of them when this old couple passed away. And you will perhaps be the better pleased to learn that when Mr. Arthur Tween, and a year or two later his wife (some years, I fancy, older than himself), passed away, their successor, a nephew, knowing my natural and pardonable interest in all that concerned the Lamb family, most kindly allowed them to pass into my possession.

And then, after a glass of home-made ginger-wine and a stroll though the old-fashioned garden —it was, I remember, the "time of gooseberries," and "we plucked them as we passed"—Mr. Tween took us to see the church and Mrs. Field's grave—

the plain and brief inscription "Mary Field," with the date of death, August 5, 1792, being just decipherable through the stains of time. We did not at first recognise Lamb's description of the place, for the pretty church, as you approach it from the country road, stands level with it, but as one passes round the church a quite other landscape breaks upon the view, the ground sloping away rapidly to the valley below, where the little river, the "Ash," wanders away to its junction with the Ouse. And as we descended the grassy slope and looked back towards the church all became clear. Lovers of Elia will recall the lines entitled "The Grandame" among Lamb's earliest verse (they appeared in 1797, in the volume of Coleridge's poems, "to which are now added poems by Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd"):—

On the green hill-top,
Hard by the house of prayer, a modest roof,
And not distinguished from its neighbour barn,
Save by a slender-tapering length of spire,
The Grandame sleeps: a plain stone barely tells
The name and date to the chance passenger.
For lowly born was she, and long had ate,
Well-earn'd, the bread of service; hers was else
A mounting spirit, one that entertained
Scorn of base action, deed dishonourable,
Or aught unseemly. I remember well
Her reverend image: I remember, too,
With what a zeal she served her master's house
And how the prattling tongue of garrulous age
Delighted to recount the oft-told tale
Or anecdote domestic. . . .

Note, in passing, the influence already on Lamb throughout of the Miltonic cadence (and Milton was his earliest and his latest love); and the tender and loving tribute ends:—

> Better 'twere to tell,
> How with a nobler zeal, and warmer love,
> She served her *heavenly Master*. I have seen
> That reverend form bent down with age and pain,
> And rankling malady: yet not for this
> Ceased she to praise her Maker, or withdrew
> Her trust from Him, her faith, and humble hope:
> So meekly had she learned to bear her cross;
> For she had studied patience in the school
> Of Christ; much comfort she had thence derived,
> And was a follower of the Nazarene.

And then, still under Mr. Tween's guidance, who had known the village and surroundings all his life, we passed on, not many hundred yards farther, to the site of Lamb's Blakesmoor. It was well that we had such a guide, for since Lamb's day the railway (the Buntingford Branch of the Great Eastern) has passed through the parish, and old roads have been diverted, and old landmarks removed, so that the site of the old house, now marked by a young plantation, would have escaped our search. But now that it was pointed out, we could still trace, by the undulations in the meadow behind, that site where the "ample pleasure gardens" once "rose backwards from the house in triple-terraces," and yet farther back, the "firry wilderness, haunt of the squirrel and the day-long murmuring pigeon."

And again, just below where once the house stood, was the quiet pool, a back-water of the little river Ash, which the young Charles Lamb, as he tells us, had allowed his childish imagination (it being beyond his then permitted bounds) to magnify into some "romantic lake." But for the rest, as Lamb had already mournfully to confess, when writing his lovely essay, in 1824, just seventy years ago, the "walks and windings of Blakesmoor" were no more, and the "plough had passed over his pleasant places." So too with the group of cottages, called "Blenheims," some half a mile away, where had lived "the fair-haired Anna"—cottages still upon the ground, but remodelled and rebuilt perhaps often since. But the lovely summer day was there, and the same wych-elms on which Lamb had often gazed, and thought perhaps, like his friend of later life, and kindred humourist, Thomas Hood, were "close against the sky." And yet one more touching discovery I was to make of how this Hertfordshire landscape had won and filled and possessed the affections of young Charles Lamb. From my own childhood his early story of "Rosamund Gray" had always brought me—sentimental, even hectic as it is, and based upon the essentially unwholesome method of Sterne and Mackenzie—a kind of pleasure unsupplied by any other romance. The scene where this little story was laid, if I had been asked on that June day, I could not have remembered. When I returned

that evening, with new ideas and new clues working in my mind, to study this episode in Charles Lamb's life, I opened the first pages of "Rosamund Gray," and read as follows:—

> It was now about a year and a half since old Margaret Gray had sold off all her effects, to pay the debts of Rosamund's father—just after the mother had died of a broken heart; for her husband had fled his country to hide his shame in a foreign land. At that period the old lady retired to a small cottage, in the village of Widford, in Hertfordshire.

And why indeed, before that day, should I have remembered this name, or had any association with it? What was Widford to me, or I to Widford? It was a mere name, perhaps one invented for the occasion, and in any case of no more interest than that of ten thousand other rural hamlets scattered through our beautiful England. But henceforth, you will believe, it meant something more, and so did the fact, also to have a new significance, that when the brother and sister jointly wrote their *Mrs. Leicester's School*, the scene of that child's book of stories also was laid in Hertfordshire, in the pretty village of Amwell, within an easy walk of Widford, sacred to every Londoner for the pure water that flows from its perennial springs; perhaps even dearer to Charles Lamb because of Izaak Walton, who, with Venator, met (you may remember) "a pack of otter-dogs of noble Mr. Sadler's upon Amwell Hill," upon that "fine

fresh May morning," in the "meadow, checquered with water-lilies and lady-smocks."

And so my friend and I drove back to Ware, and to our dinner at the little inn; neither of us, I remember, caring much to talk, but both of us very happy for the unexpected light that had fallen upon the story of Charles and Mary Lamb, and for the new charm that was henceforth to rest upon "Blakesmoor in Hertfordshire," and in Mary's description of the same old mansion in *Mrs. Leicester's School*—the "Twelve Cæsars" ranged round the spacious hall, the Hogarth prints, and the broken battledore and shuttlecock "on the marble slab in the corner," recalling the music of childish voices that had once echoed through it. And so we returned to town, myself all eagerness to rewrite whole passages of my *Memoir*, happily still in manuscript; and more and more convinced of the soundness of Dr. Routh's advice, never to take one's facts at second hand—"Always verify your references"!

It was a few years later, on another lovely day in summer, when, with the same dear friend, I first explored Mackery End, in the same county, and within a short walk of Wheathampstead. I have elsewhere furnished a few words of guidance for those who would make the excursion for themselves. This evening I would rather let Elia himself be your guide. Let me read you—it is short as it is delightful—his own story of the pilgrimage he made thither with his sister (his

"cousin Bridget," he calls her) and his old friend and schoolfellow Barron Field, then home from New Zealand, where he held a judgeship.[1]

And now I have been telling you of experiences the first of which date from many years ago. I paid more than one visit afterwards to Widford, and the last time I saw Mrs. Tween was in 1890, when Widford Church having been then lately improved, and its "slender-tapering length of spire" restored to the full height which it had worn to the eyes of old Mrs. Field and her grandchildren, the rector, Mr. Lockwood, kindly invited me to preach at the reopening. Mrs. Tween was then a widow, and in the following year herself passed away. Only within this last week I read in the *Times* obituary the death of her sister, Mrs. Charles Tween (the two sisters had married two brothers), at the advanced age of ninety-three. Neither sister left children, and the race of Randal Norris is at an end. My dear friend, Davis, most genial of antiquaries, most helpful of fellow-workers, is also no more.

All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

What cannot pass away is the singular and unique position in literature of those slight essays of Lamb's which alone provide interest or indeed excuse for my narrative. What is it constitutes the *virtue* which gives permanence

[1] [The lecturer here read Lamb's essay "Mackery End in Hertfordshire."]

to literary work of so slight, so apparently ephemeral, a character as these rambling disquisitions on matters so personal to the writer himself? What makes us not merely forgive, but be perennially grateful for, these miscellaneous confidences of a London clerk of homely origin and prosaic occupations? No answer can be given, save the undying attraction that belongs to the union of sincerity and charm, which means purity of heart, and tenderness—itself gold, and turning to gold all it touches—the charity which in literature, as in life, is the grace that is above all graces.

NETHER STOWEY

IN these days of many biographies—*auto* and other—bristling with personalities and private gossip, to say of any fresh addition to their number that it is eminently "racy" might easily convey a wrong impression, and encourage false hopes. And yet that much-abused epithet is precisely applicable to the memoir of Tom Poole—Coleridge's, Wordsworth's, Lamb's, and everybody's Tom Poole—which has just been given us by Mrs. Henry Sandford, herself one of that remarkable Somersetshire family.[1] She has to tell of many persons, such as those just mentioned, "familiar in our mouths as household words," because of their literary importance; and yet it is not too much to say that the peculiar charm of her narrative is due even more to the bit of unfamiliar English scenery among which her characters move, and which did so much to direct their genius and even to mould their characters. The book is racy—because it is "racy of the soil." Mrs.

[1] *Thomas Poole and his Friends*, by Mrs. Henry Sandford. In two volumes. London, 1888.

Sandford here and there betrays a slight nervousness lest by letting in the light of day upon her beloved Somersetshire hills and coombs she should be inviting the irrepressible tourist, and endangering for all time the quiet and loneliness which now add to the charm of the Quantock country. Not that she is selfish, like the literary gentleman who objected to Chaucer being modernised because he wished to keep the poet "for himself and a few friends,"—only she confesses, with much reason, that the solitude and the untroddenness of the Quantocks have a fascination all their own. Mrs. Sandford clearly knows and loves the country she describes, and she has the art of making her readers know and love it too. And though some among these readers may have heard for the first time through this very book of the noble and public-spirited tanner of Nether Stowey, they will soon find themselves as much interested in the joys and sorrows of the Poole family as if they had known them from childhood. And for the future Nether Stowey will be hardly less celebrated for having produced Thomas Poole, than for having, during two eventful years, given shelter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and drawn to its neighbourhood William and Dorothy Wordsworth.

Coleridge was an inhabitant of Stowey for nearly two years—from the Christmas week of 1796 till the autumn of 1798. He was very low in funds, and in spirits, when his friend and

ardent admirer Thomas Poole, who had made his acquaintance through friends in Bristol, secured a humble cottage then vacant, close to his own house and tan-yard, and found Coleridge, with his young wife and infant son, Hartley, only too willing to accept a modest shelter near so good a friend. The two years that followed were perhaps the happiest—they were certainly the most stimulating to his poetic genius—in all Coleridge's life. The money-question was not urgent for the time. Charles Lloyd, the son of the Birmingham banker, boarded with the Coleridges, content to share the inconveniences of what Coleridge afterwards spoke of as the "Hovel" for the sake of the daily converse with his marvellous friend; and Poole and a few fellow-admirers of the poet subscribed a yearly purse which further helped to keep the wolf from the door. Meantime the life was healthy; the surrounding scenery superb for those who loved long rambles, and Coleridge was as yet a never-tiring walker. The opium-difficulty was not yet serious, though the habit of taking that drug as an antidote to rheumatic pains had certainly begun as early as the summer of 1796, if not before.[1] If its effects showed themselves at all upon the poet's genius during these years, it was as yet on the intellectual or imaginative side, rather than on the moral. The enervation of will, and the destruction of self-respect, were yet to be. But in the visionary and spiritual exaltation of

[1] [See note on p. 105.]

certain notable poems of this period, the dream-land of opium certainly seems discernible. No one can doubt that the unconscious state between sleep and waking in which Coleridge represents "Kubla Khan" as having come to him, unsought, at that lonely farmhouse near Porlock, was due to no other cause. And, if so, the very mis-statement of Coleridge on the subject of the poem's origin is one of those many self-delusions, so often afterwards to recur, which are among the melancholy results of the opium-slavery.

Coleridge and his household were settled in the little cottage at Nether Stowey by Christmas Day, 1796. A certain cheerfulness in facing domestic discomfort was certainly one of the better sides of Coleridge's character. And in this, it has been well said, as in some other respects, a certain parallelism with Mr. Micawber is often noticeable. Poole had rather discouraged the poet from making this venture, when it came to the point. The difficulty of servants seemed even formidable; but Samuel Taylor declared that this could be got over, even as regarded the preparation of their daily food. Omniscience was always his foible, and when Poole urged that the only available servant had no experience that way, the poet replied, "As to cooking, I will myself instruct the maid." On the whole they seem to have managed fairly well among them. Sara Coleridge, who had probably not been reared in a school of domestic idleness, helped in the

cooking and in the washing, and generally showed herself a capable housewife. They were even able to entertain occasional guests, especially as the ever-hospitable Tom Poole and his mother were at hand to provide spare bedrooms and other accommodation. Wordsworth and his sister from Racedown were there in the June of the following year, and Charles Lamb joined the party in July, as he has recorded in a well-known letter.

Out of this pleasant visit, when Coleridge and the Wordsworths and Lamb spent their memorable week together, arose the idea that the two poets might arrange a permanent companionship in that delightful neighbourhood. The party had roamed together over the lovely Quantock Hills, all except poor Coleridge, who was kept at home with his injured leg ; and we can imagine the charm that the richly wooded hills and coombs of Somersetshire would have for William and Dorothy Wordsworth. For the scenery was in every way as beautiful as their native Cumberland, and yet quite different. Why should not the brother and sister, who were quite free to choose their place of abode, migrate from Racedown to the Quantocks? Nothing was easier, if they could only find a home. This proved, through happy accident, a simple matter. An important family of the district lying between Nether Stowey and the Bristol Channel were the St. Albyns of Alfoxden. The St. Albyn of that day was a minor, and the home-farm was let to a

tenant who did not require the old family mansion for his own use. To find a tenant for a large country-house, with no land attached, was not an easy task. In any case only a nominal rent was to be expected in the circumstances, and this nominal rent the Wordsworths were prepared to offer. The letter of agreement by which they undertook to pay John Bartholomew twenty-three pounds for the furnished house, furniture, gardens, and stables during one year from midsummer to midsummer, is given us by Mrs. Sandford. It was really only one wing of the house that was to be occupied, for the sole inmates were Wordsworth and his sister, and the little son of their friend Basil Montagu, who had been placed under their care. And those who love to read of the circumstances in which great poets produce their masterpieces will remember how often in the notes on his early poems supplied by the poet himself allusion is made to the surroundings of Alfoxden—the gravel walks up and down which the poet paced while he composed the tale of "Betty Foy"; the holly-grove, and the dell with the hidden waterfall near which the periwinkle "trailed its wreaths"; and the lovely lines sent by William to Dorothy by the hands of their little boy-inmate, Edward Montagu:

> It is the first mild day of March:
> Each minute sweeter than before;
> The red-breast sings from the tall larch
> That stands beside our door.

There is a blessing in the air
Which seems a sense of joy to yield
To the bare trees, and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field.

My sister! ('tis a wish of mine)
Now that our morning meal is done,
Make haste, your morning task resign;
Come forth and feel the sun.

Edward will come with you;—and, pray,
Put on with speed your woodland dress;
And bring no book; for this one day
We'll give to idleness.

The Wordsworths took possession of this spacious country mansion in the late summer of 1797. From that day the association with Coleridge was constant, and the mutual influence of the two poets was attended with permanent results of singular interest for both. Both had been hitherto engaged upon works in which it was impossible that either should succeed. Each had been dreaming of success in dramatic writing — Wordsworth with the *Borderers*, Coleridge with *Osorio*, afterwards re-named *Remorse*. But now that they were in daily converse on poetry, its powers and limitations, its true sphere and its false, and all those questions on which Wordsworth finally delivered his judgment in the well-known prefaces, they began to find inspiration in themes nearer home, and in forms as remote as

possible from the dramatic. The peasant life of Stowey and Holford—

> The common growth of mother earth,
> Her simplest mirth and tears—

revealed themselves to Wordsworth as being worthy of poetic treatment, and as needing no more elaborate setting than the ballad-metres which he had learned to love in Percy's *Reliques*.

The precise origin of the *Lyrical Ballads*, the joint work of Wordsworth and Coleridge, is matter of familiar history. Both poets have left in writing their version of its origin, and they are in substantial agreement. The two companions were keen and indefatigable walkers. They were living in the heart of one of the loveliest counties of England, and they naturally desired to explore farther into its beauties. Neither possessed much surplus income for such luxuries as travelling, and they desired to raise sufficient funds to defray the cost of a week's excursion. A joint poem was the first idea, to be contributed to a magazine; but when the poem far outgrew the limits first proposed, when moreover it turned out that two men of individuality strongly marked and widely different could not well collaborate upon the same poem, the plan of a joint volume took the place of the original idea. Hence the first volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*, in which the poem out of which it grew naturally and fittingly took the

first place. It opened with the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

That wonderful poem (writes Mrs. Sandford) in which Coleridge once for all touched that supreme height in poetry, which is neither to be found by seeking nor attained by striving, originated, as we all know, in a walking expedition from Alfoxden to Porlock, Linton, and Lynmouth. Porlock is perhaps the most beautiful spot in all the beautiful West Country—where the brown tint of the Severn Sea merges at last into Atlantic blue; where the coombs run down to the very water's edge; and where the sea is bordered by rich red sandstone cliffs, crowned with the overhanging woods that are the latest haunt of the wild red deer. The walk from Porlock to Lynmouth, keeping "close to the shore about four miles . . . through woods rising almost perpendicularly from the sea with views of the opposite mountains of Wales," is almost the most charming bit of English scenery that I know. I have walked it more than once, and each time with fresh delight and admiration—for my husband was a true nephew of Thomas Poole, and loved the Quantocks as if he had been born amongst them—but certainly we never selected November for such an excursion. It seems to me that a walking tour begun at "half-past four" on a "dark and cloudy" November afternoon, is a fairly good illustration of the fantastic waywardness in their proceedings, which excited such unreasonable suspicions in the breasts of the West Country folk concerning the tenants of Alfoxden. What possible good motive could any three people have—one a lady—for stealing out of the comfortable shelter of their own roof at such a time, and not coming back for days? It is true they might have done all this and more in the North, and no one would have made a remark, or hazarded a con-

jecture; but in the North Wordsworth was a privileged person, as no doubt he would soon have become in Somersetshire if he had stayed there long enough. But in 1797 there was a disposition to question everything he did, and we can easily imagine the stories Mrs. St. Albyn may have heard from her maid, illustrating only too well the weightier misgivings of those local magnates who would, perhaps, think it their duty to call, to ask her if she were aware of the kind of person to whom Alfoxden had been let. [i. 247.]

The general plan of the "Ancient Mariner" seems to have been sketched out during the first few hours of the excursion, on the way over the northernmost spur of the Quantocks to Watchet. The machinery of the poem arose out of a variety of detached and apparently accidental circumstances. Close to Poole and Coleridge lived a young man, agent to Lord Egmont, an important landholder of that neighbourhood, of the name of Cruikshank. This Mr. Cruikshank had had a remarkable dream in which he saw a skeleton ship worked by a skeleton crew, and had told it to Coleridge. Coleridge himself had been much among ships and mariners in Bristol, when lodging down in Redcliff Street; and now, at Stowey, he was within easy reach of the waters of the Bristol Channel. The stately ships were always passing "to their haven under the hill," and the sea was to him a daily sight, and naturally entered into his own daily dreams. So Cruikshank's spectral ship he resolved to make the scene of a great crime and its retribution. What

should the crime be? At this stage of the design Wordsworth intervened with the killing of the albatross. He had been lately reading in the voyages of George Shelvocke, the sailor and explorer of the eighteenth century; and it fell to Shelvocke to relate how in terrible weather, while beating about off Cape Horn, the ship had for its solitary companion "a disconsolate albatross" which hovered for days in the vessel's wake. Shelvocke's "second captain," with the foolish superstition of his class, chose to connect the stormy weather with the presence of this noble and harmless creature, and caused it to be shot. The incident (told by Shelvocke with a strange impressiveness) had gone to the heart of Wordsworth, and led him to suggest a similar crime as that which Coleridge's mariner should be required to expiate.

The actual machinery of the poem was therefore supplied in almost equal proportions by three men — Cruikshank, Coleridge, and Wordsworth. Their separate suggestions went together into the crucible, and out of it in the end came the splendid result we all know. Of late years it has been generally assumed that yet another element in the plot of the poem was derived by Coleridge from an alien source. There is extant an early Christian legend of a pious poor man, left accidentally on board of a forsaken vessel, and miraculously delivered by a company of angels who suddenly appeared, and, manning the ship,

brought it safe into the harbour. It is of course possible that Coleridge in the course of his multifarious reading, and with his amazing memory, had met with the epistles of Paulinus of Nola, and had stored up the incident for future use. But there seems no reason why the coincidence, such as it is, should not have been purely accidental. The powers of darkness connected with the crime of slaying the creature "beloved of God" necessitated the counteraction in the end of the Powers of Light. However that may have been, at this point Coleridge's indebtedness to others is presumed to have ended, for all the actual writing, all the witchery of the versification—with the exception of a couplet and a phrase contributed by Wordsworth—were Coleridge's own.

And yet we have perhaps still to look for the actual *genesis* of the poem elsewhere. There is a significant expression occurring in one of the first reviews of the "Ancient Mariner" that appeared after its publication. It was in the *Critical Review*, and the article is attributed by Lamb, in a well-known letter, to Southey. "If you wrote that review in the *Critical*," he says, "I am sorry you are so sparing of praise to the 'Ancient Marinere.' So far from calling it as you do, with some wit, but more severity, a 'Dutch attempt,' etc., etc., I call it a right English attempt, and a successful one, to dethrone German sublimity." The reviewer had described the poem as a "Dutch attempt at German sublimity." That

the article was Southey's, as Lamb conjectured, is put beyond all doubt by an extant letter of Southey to William Taylor of Norwich, of about the same date, in which he again characterises the poem as "a clumsy attempt at German sublimity." What was clearly in Southey's mind when he used the phrase was the recent introduction to an English public of the romantic and supernatural ballads of Gottfried Augustus Bürger, through the translations of this same William Taylor. Two of the most famous of these ballads, the "Lenore" and the "Parson's Daughter," in Taylor's versions, had been then recently published in the *Monthly Magazine*. But these, and other of Taylor's translations, had been freely circulated in manuscript for some years, and were well known to Southey, Coleridge, and their circle. Among these ballads the "Wild Huntsman" was conspicuous for power and beauty. It was the story of a despotic margrave who would not refrain from his favourite sport even on the Sabbath day, and who, with his men and dogs, respected neither life nor property, but carried rapine and misery ever in their train. The margrave's "good angel" in vain essays to stay his hand, while a dusky figure, who gallops on the other side, urges him to laugh all such scruples to scorn. The "evil voice" is listened to; and when at last a "holy hermit" standing before his cell, near which the driven deer has sought a refuge, also pleads in vain for the

sanctity of life, even in the meanest creature that breathes, the doom that he has thus challenged falls upon the unhappy huntsman. The whole rout vanishes on the instant: a voice of thunder is heard from above; and the unrepentant margrave is doomed to "urge on his wild career," pursued by spectral hounds for all eternity.

William Taylor has himself pointed out that Bürger was probably indebted to Dryden's *Theodore and Honoria* for the incident of the spectre-hunt. This is not unlikely, for it was the romantic ballad-literature of England, as is well known, which had first directed the genius of Bürger into its special line. But this is certain, that if Bürger found his inspiration in the poetry of England, English poetry received back from him a gift fraught with momentous results upon its own subsequent development. Walter Scott became one of the most conspicuous of the translators of Bürger, and Southey and Coleridge at once showed the effects of this new stimulus and example—the one in his Ballads of Diablerie, the other in the supernatural machinery of "Christabel" and the "Mariner." It is clear to me that Southey recognised in Coleridge's great poem an attempt to rival Bürger, using Bürger's own weapons. That he should honestly vote the attempt "clumsy," is one of those extraordinary verdicts of contemporary criticism of which in every fresh generation the rise of a new poetic genius supplies examples.

But it was not merely the idea of a romantic ballad, with a supernatural setting, that Coleridge owed to his German predecessor. The really noticeable coincidence between the "Mariner" and the "Wild Huntsman" lies in the identity of the crime for which both had to suffer—the outrage upon animal life, the harmless creature "beloved of God"; in the one case the milk-white stag that had found sanctuary, in the other the too-confiding albatross. The moral of the two poems is respectively set forth, in terms curiously alike. In Bürger it is

> To Heaven not in vain ascend
> The groans of suffering beast or man,

and in Coleridge, the verse of matchless and imperishable beauty,

> He prayeth best who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us
> He made and loveth all.

This new-born love and consideration for the lower animals of course did not come to Coleridge and Wordsworth from Bürger. So far as it was due to any leading thinker of the eighteenth century it was to Rousseau; but it was, in fact, but one phase of the revived pity for all who had suffered wrong at the hands of "man, proud man," which was at the root of the vast social upheavals of that period. It is as conspicuous in

Cowper and in Burns as in Coleridge and his companions. And it is worth noticing that in the second volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*, published at the close of the century in 1800, Wordsworth gave the place of honour to a second long ballad, even more closely a counterpart of the "Wild Huntsman" than his friend's "Ancient Mariner." This was "Hart-Leap Well," where for the second time an innocent creature becomes the victim to man's cruelty and thoughtless pleasures. In this latter poem the supernatural element is also present; though it is worked out, not in the punishment of the evil-doer, but in the mysterious blight and gloom that from that day enveloped the scenes amid which the hunted creature breathed its last. And here, too, a moral is enforced, in closest sympathy with that of the "Wild Huntsman" and the "Mariner":

> One lesson, shepherd, let us two divide,
> Taught both by what she shows and what conceals;
> Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
> With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.

We can well understand therefore upon what sympathetic soil the incident of the albatross fell, when Wordsworth found it in his chance reading of Shelvocke, and how naturally it fitted in with Coleridge's previously conceived idea of a crime and a retribution associated with the sea and ships.

So much for the general outline of the

"Ancient Mariner." Little coincidences with sights and sounds of Nether Stowey in the details of the poem are discernible by the curious. The "hidden brook"

> In the leafy month of June,
> That to the sleeping woods all night
> Singeth a quiet tune,

is delightfully suggestive of the innumerable rivulets of clear water from the hills that intersect the coombs and valleys of the Quantock country, hidden among the oak coppice and heather. And a more prosaic detail is illustrated pleasantly by Mrs. Sandford from one of the many letters of Tom Poole's that have been preserved. It shall be told in her own words.

One of Poole's minor interests at this period was the improvement of the Nether Stowey church choir. Perhaps, however, modern minds may cavil at the word *improvement* when it becomes clear that his ideal of church music must have been Nebuchadnezzar's band. We find him writing to Dr. Langford in December 1797, to report that "our singers are more than commonly active"; those who had been dissatisfied with certain arrangements made by their new vicar had come round, and had at length joined the choir that he had established, and if he would now send "the bassoon and the music" that he had promised, "I think, sir," says Tom Poole, "that we shall make good use of them." Those who are fond of noticing the little coincidences of literary circumstance, will be amused to recognise in that bassoon an instrument of music destined to a celebrity little dreamed of by

the Stowey singers: for who can feel much doubt that this and no other was the very original and prototype of "the loud bassoon" whose sound moved the wedding-guest to beat his breast, whilst none the less he continued to sit spellbound, listening to the Ancient Mariner? [i. 246.]

Mrs. Sandford is doubtless right in her conjecture, and she might have added as yet another "coincidence of literary circumstance" that the musical instrument in question was destined to a further poetic immortality, in a lyric no less musical and marvellous than Coleridge's. For "who can feel much doubt" (to borrow Mrs. Sandford's own query) that the "loud bassoon" of the wedding-feast is the ancestor of the

Flute, violin, bassoon

of that subsequent festivity, whose sounds the roses overheard, to the envy of Maud's unhappy lover, as he "stood at the gate alone"?

The *Lyrical Ballads, with a few other Poems*, appeared in print in September 1798, with no author's name upon the title-page, and published by Coleridge's devout admirer, Joseph Cottle of Bristol. The little volume (surely one of the most interesting in literary annals) fell all but dead from the press. The critics, those authoritative guides of public opinion, were upon it in an instant. We have seen how Southey (who ought to have known better) dealt with Coleridge's masterpiece; and the others were all in accord. The

Monthly Magazine could make neither "head nor tail of it," nor did the general public (as other juries sometimes do) refuse to accept the judge's summing up. People took up the volume in Cottle's shop, and looked at it, but did not buy. As with Wordsworth's Lucy, there were "none to praise, and very few to love." Cottle took fright —he had but a small proportion of courage to his opinions—and promptly sold the large remainder of the first edition to a publisher in London. Poor Sara Coleridge was probably more disappointed, because more surprised, by the failure of the enterprise than either her husband or Wordsworth. Six months after the publication, when Coleridge was off to Germany, she states pretty much the truth in her epigrammatic postscript in a letter to Thomas Poole,—"The *Lyrical Ballads* are not liked at all by any"; and again later, "The *Lyrical Ballads* are laughed at and disliked by all, with very few exceptions." Coleridge himself, be it acknowledged to his credit, rarely, if ever, resented the absence of public appreciation. He and the Wordsworths had done a wise thing for their own peace of mind in leaving England for Germany immediately after the publication of the joint volume. Coleridge went abroad to acquire the German language; Wordsworth and his sister had other reasons, partly the society of Coleridge (which they did not, however, enjoy for long), and partly because their continued residence at Alfoxden was no

longer possible. Among the many pleasant surprises in Mrs. Sandford's volumes is the letter from Thomas Poole to Mrs. St. Albyn, imploring that lady to reconsider her determination not to let the house any longer to Wordsworth. For among other dreadful things that had occurred during the poet's tenancy, that terrible revolutionary John Thelwall, while on a visit to Poole and Coleridge at Stowey, had been over to Alfoxden to tea. "Surely," pleads Tom Poole, with an earnestness almost pathetic, "the common duties of hospitality were not to be refused to any man. Be assured," he goes on to say—"I speak it from my own knowledge—Mr. Wordsworth, of all men alive, is the last who will give any cause to complain of his opinions, his conduct, or his disturbing the peace of any one. Let me beg you, madam, to hearken to no calumnies, no party spirit, nor to join with any in disturbing one who only wishes to live in tranquillity." If this be not a genuine example of the "irony of fate," that useful and much-worked expression may be at once dismissed from further service!

Whether Wordsworth's application for a further tenancy of Alfoxden was actually refused, or whether he prudently forbore to press it, is not certain. But at Midsummer, 1798, he gave up possession, and in the interval between that date and the appearance of the *Lyrical Ballads* took at least one excursion, memorable for having produced the poem which represents the high-water

mark of Wordsworth's power, as the "Ancient Mariner" marks that of his friend and fellow-labourer. On leaving Alfoxden, the Wordsworths paid short visits to Coleridge at Stowey and to Cottle at Bristol, and then "started together on a walking tour along the banks of the Wye, of which the poetical fruits were the lines on Tintern Abbey." They were composed in their entirety, Wordsworth himself has told us, between leaving Tintern one morning and reaching Bristol in the evening. Being thus last written of the twenty-three poems that compose the volume, it brings the book to a close as memorable as its beginning, for it opened with the "Ancient Mariner."

The book is indeed full from end to end of Nether Stowey and its neighbourhood, and Wordsworth's portion of the contents, by far the largest, being composed (as he has recorded) mostly in the open air, in front of Alfoxden House, or in the holly-grove by which the house is approached from Holford village, is redolent "of spring time and the cheerful dawn." It was in Holford that he met the forlorn peasant, bearing on his shoulders the "last of the flock"; it was the solitary thorn on the hill-top overlooking Alfoxden that suggested the story of the betrayed and deserted Martha Ray, who haunted the spot day and night,

> known to every star,
> And every wind that blows.

It was a friend from the neighbourhood who

told the poet the story of that other "Mad Mother," whose "eyes were wild"; and it was Thomas Poole himself who was really answerable for the "Idiot Boy," when he incautiously related a village anecdote of not much humour to a poet who was endowed with even less. But Wordsworth, amid scenes and people so different from the bracing and hardy North, was not unmindful of the rock from which he was hewn, and the old "Cumberland Beggar," and above all the "Lines Left on a Yew Tree" were there to witness that already Wordsworth was a "Lake Poet," and that he was of other than a West Country stock. Of this last-named poem, by the way, composed as far back as 1795, Mrs. Sandford is doubtless right in conjecturing that it was the "Inscription" read to Charles Lamb, on his visit to Stowey in 1797, concerning which he wrote with such enthusiasm to Coleridge on his return. And Lamb was right as usual, for nobler lines had not been written in England since Milton died than those with which that "Inscription" ends:

If thou be one whose heart the holy forms
Of young imagination have kept pure,
Stranger! henceforth be warned; and know that pride,
Howe'er disguised in its own majesty,
Is littleness; that he who feels contempt
For any living thing, hath faculties
Which he has never used: that thought with him
Is in its infancy. The man, whose eye
Is ever on himself, doth look on one
The least of nature's works, one who might move

The wise man to that scorn which wisdom holds
Unlawful ever. O, be wiser thou!
Instructed that true knowledge leads to love,
True dignity abides with him alone
Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
Can still respect, and still revere himself,
In lowliness of heart.

Besides Stowey and Alfoxden, the haunts of poets, there were other spots of ground among those peaceful Somersetshire hills and coombs having their own poetry, and their own tragedy. Hardly more than a mile from where Wordsworth paced the holly-groves of Alfoxden, the tourist is to this day startled, as he pauses to consult his Ordnance map, by the grim title of "Walford's Gibbet." It marks where once a terrible crime received its final retribution at the hands of justice—a ghastly and yet pathetic story. A miserable charcoal-burner drawn into marriage with a misshapen woman, because his mother chose to repel the girl he truly and worthily loved; misery, and drink, and then murder; and lastly the law's righteous sentence, executed on the spot where the crime was committed—this was the "Somersetshire Tragedy" which Coleridge and Wordsworth first heard from the lips of Thomas Poole, who had known the unhappy criminal in his boyish days. They persuaded Poole to put the story upon paper, and some time afterwards Coleridge, struck with the graphic power and yet simplicity of Poole's method, asked that it might appear in his *Friend*. "If

you have no particular objection," he says, "no *very* particular and *insurmountable* reason against it, do let me have that narrative of John Walford, which of itself stamps you as a poet of the first class in the pathetic, and in the painting of poetry, so very rarely combined." Mrs. Sandford gives us an extract from the story as told by Poole. Coleridge had not overstated his friend's capabilities for poetic prose. Poole, after the fashion of his day, occasionally penned compliments in metre and rhyme. Mrs. Sandford gives us a specimen or two, sufficient to show that, after that kind, the gods had not made him poetical. But when he essayed to tell in simplest and most earnest words what had really touched his deepest sympathies, he became poetical, perhaps without knowing it. There is a genuine beauty in his account of the stillness of the crowd as the wretched man kissed the hand of the faithful girl who might have blessed his life, and parted from her for ever—"some tears for the first time rolling down his cheeks." There is a final touch that even Wordsworth might have envied: "All were amazed—afraid to breathe; the buzz of the multitude was so hushed that even the twittering of the birds in the neighbouring woods was heard."

I have called this paper "Nether Stowey," preferring for the moment to treat of the place and its surroundings rather than of the wise and large-hearted man who gives his name to Mrs.

Sandford's volumes. But it would be quite a mistake to infer that Tom Poole gives them only his name. He forms their leading interest and charm from first to last. Around him the poets, scientists, economists, naturally group themselves as they did in real life. He is far too distinguished a man to be dismissed parenthetically, or at the end of a review. He must be studied, as he deserves, apart. Most of us have known him, hitherto, if at all, as the friend of Coleridge; but had Coleridge never lived, he would be no less interesting a man; the sagacious and practical counsellor, as full of generosity as of justice, who in a period of exceptional distress could both give, and forbear to give, as he saw good, anticipating in this as in other ways the Octavia Hills and Samuel Barnetts of our later day: the initiator of schools and clubs and friendly societies at a time when to advocate such things was too often to invite suspicion and obloquy even from the local clergy and gentry of the neglected villages. To be "serviceable" was the motto of Thomas Poole's life; and wherever help was wanted, whether by his private friends, his own workmen, his poor neighbours, the interests of his county-town or of his own special industry, his untiring energy never failed. Strange and perplexing in views and in temper—deeply religious, yet wildly eclectic in his theology; of roughest manners and softest heart; his passion for books as pronounced as that for practical work—no

wonder that his own nearest and dearest found him something of a mystery. An unrequited passion for a cousin was the one romance of his life; and when that was seen to be hopeless, he simply transferred the love and tenderness of which he was capable to all who needed pity, counsel, or substantial help; and when he died they found in his desk a tiny packet on which was inscribed, "The hair of my poor shepherd, who served me faithfully for twenty-three years."

Coleridge, in his later years, enjoying after life's fitful fever the quiet shelter of Mr. Gillman's roof at Highgate, drew a portrait of his old friend. It was in the form of a note to the second edition of his treatise on Church and State.

A man whom I have seen now in his harvest-field or the market; now in a committee-room with the Rickmans and Ricardos of the age; at another time with Davy, Woolaston, and the Wedgwoods; now with Wordsworth, Southey, and other friends not unheard of in the republic of letters; now in the drawing-rooms of the rich and the noble; and now presiding at the annual dinner of a village benefit society; and in each seeming to be in the very place he was intended for, and taking the part to which his tastes, talents, and attainments gave him an admitted right.

And yet this is not the most remarkable, not the most individualising trait of our friend's character. It is almost overlooked in the originality and raciness of his intellect; in the life, freshness, and practical value of his remarks and notices, truths plucked as they are

growing, and delivered to you with the dew on them, the fair earnings of an observing eye, armed and kept on the watch by thought and meditation; and above all in the integrity, i.e., *entireness* of his being (*integrum et sine cerâ vas*), the steadiness of his attachments, the activity and persistence of a benevolence which so graciously presses a warm temper into the service of a yet warmer heart, and so lights up the little flaws and imperfections incident to humanity in its choicest specimens, that were their removal at the option of his friends (and few have, or deserve to have, so many!) not a man among them but would vote for leaving him as he is. [ii. 321.]

Henry Nelson Coleridge thought that this might "in substance be worthily converted into an epitaph." Mrs. Sandford agrees, and asks, "who so fit to pen Tom Poole's epitaph as the friend whom he loved above all others, and whose friendship was the chief treasure, as it was also the most remarkable experience of his life?" Poole died somewhat suddenly in 1837, and sleeps as unobtrusively as he had lived, his flat gravestone almost concealed beneath an overhanging thorn, in the beautiful churchyard of Stowey. He has been dead more than fifty years, but the older villagers remember and speak with reverence of "Justice" Poole, and the place is full of traditions of his goodness and his oddities. The "Tartarean tan-pits," that Coleridge joked about, are mouldering into ruin, and overgrown with grass and flowers—Nature "ever busy with her hand in healing." But the "dear

Stowey gutter" still rushes impetuously throughout the year before Tom Poole's house, brimming with the stream that comes direct from the peaceful bosom of the Quantock Hills.

> The stream, an emblem of his bounty flows,

and an emblem, too, of the pure and cheering influence that during a long life made all men happier and better in his native town.

COLERIDGE'S ODE TO WORDSWORTH

THERE are few lines in the loftier walks of English poetry better known than these following :—

> O Lady! we receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone does nature live:
> Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!

But, as is the case with many another familiar quotation, they are better known than is the splendid poem "Dejection, an Ode," in which they are to be found.

The history of this poem is interesting. It was written, as the poet's daughter tells us in her edition of the *Biographia Literaria*, on April 4, 1802. Coleridge had then been living since the summer of 1800 at Greta Hall, near Keswick, the house to be afterwards honourably distinguished as the long residence of the admirable Southey. The house, when Coleridge took it, was partitioned off into two dwelling-places, one of which was occupied by the owner and landlord. Coleridge was attracted to the Lake country, we may be sure, by the circumstance that Wordsworth was only twelve miles off, at Grasmere.

Coleridge had been writing more or less regularly for the *Morning Post* before he went to reside at Greta Hall, and he continued to do so for several years. The poem on Dejection, written in April of the year 1802, remained unprinted for just six months, when it appeared in the *Morning Post* of October 4, 1802, and then remained uncollected and unacknowledged by its author until the publication of the *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817. The lines just cited are certainly the best known in the whole poem, though it abounds in passages of rare eloquence and beauty. Hence the Lady there addressed is closely associated in our minds with the poem and its author. And it is therefore the more interesting to note that in the version of the ode as first printed the Lady does not appear, her place being filled throughout by a certain "Edmund," to whom the poem is virtually addressed. Those who will refer to the four-volumed edition of Coleridge's poems[1] will find a record of the fact, and in the notes certain other variations between the first text of the poem and that afterwards given in the *Sibylline Leaves*. The principal variations may be supplied without reference if the reader remembers to substitute "Edmund" for "Lady" where the latter word occurs, and to alter the personal and other pronouns—"he" for "she," and so forth—in due accord.

[1] Published by Pickering in 1877, but now the property of Messrs. Macmillan.

Thus, in the second stanza or strophe of the ode we shall read thus:

> O Edmund! in this wan and heartless mood,
> To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,
> All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
> Have I been gazing on the western sky
> And its peculiar tint of yellow green.

And the fifth section of the ode will run as follows:—

> O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me
> What this strong music in the soul may be!
> What, and wherein it doth exist,
> This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
> This beautiful and beauty-making power.
> Joy, virtuous Edmund! joy that ne'er was given,
> Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
> Life and life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,
> Joy, Edmund! is the spirit and the power
> Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower—
> A new Earth and new Heaven
> Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud.

But it is when we arrive at the concluding lines of the ode that we find the most significant divergence between the two versions. In the later text five lines have disappeared from the earlier, and by restoring these we find the ode originally ending thus:

> 'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:
> Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!
> Visit him, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,
> And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,
> May all the stars hang bright above his dwelling,
> Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth.

With light heart may he rise,
Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,
And sing his lofty song, and teach me to rejoice!
O Edmund, friend of my devoutest choice,
O raised from anxious dread and busy care
By the immenseness of the good and fair
Which thou see'st everywhere,
Joy lifts thy spirit, joy attunes thy voice
To him may all things live from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of his living soul.
O simple spirit, guided from above!
Dear Edmund! friend devoutest of my choice,
Thus may'st thou ever, evermore rejoice.

Now the question at once presents itself—who was the "Edmund" of the poem as originally conceived? The passages afterwards omitted seem to mark him out as a more real person than the shadowy "Lady" substituted for him. The mere name of Edmund tells nothing, suggests nothing. Coleridge was fond of the name, using it elsewhere for imaginary personages in his song. But there is something in the almost impassioned earnestness of the language here employed, and in the definiteness of the qualities attributed to him, that prevent our regarding him as a mere poetical device, a lay figure about whom the verses might be draped. He is spoken of as Coleridge's dearest friend, as a poet of noblest aims, and as one to whom especially the "pure heart" and the deep communion with Nature have brought a joy "undreamt of by the sensual and the proud." Was there any one of whom all this might be told with pre-eminent truth? Certainly there was, and

the man was Wordsworth. Since the two poets first met five years before, the influence of no other personal friend over Coleridge could be described in the terms used in this poem. Wordsworth was beyond question his dearest friend and his poetic master. It was the association with the mind and spirit of Wordsworth that had caused the younger poet to rise above the plaintive melodiousness of Bowles into altogether different regions of thought and feeling.

Reading over again the first version of the ode (which is really an Ode to Edmund, though its subject is the poet's own state of mind), we discover, I think, a fresh interest in it, as well as some other internal evidence as to the identity of "Edmund." We cannot be wrong, for instance, in recognising a distinct allusion to Wordsworth's Lucy Gray, the "solitary child," in the seventh section of the ode. The raving of the wind recalls the poet from thoughts of his own afflictions to listen to this new voice. He hears at first in the storm-blasts the "rushing of a host in rout, with groans of trampled men," and then the tempest modulates into a gentler key of sadness:

> But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence.
> And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,
> With groans and tremulous shudderings—all is over.
> It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud—
> A tale of less affright,
> And tempered with delight,

As Otway's self had framed the tender lay.
'Tis of a little child
Upon a lonesome wild
Not far from home, but she hath lost her way
And now moans loud in bitter grief and fear,
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear.

Here the graceful indirect compliment to his friend "as Otway's self had framed the tender lay":[1] the words "lonesome wild," borrowed from the last stanza but one of "Lucy Gray": the reference to the "bridge of wood, a furlong from their door," which the child had reached unconsciously after her long wanderings, in the line,

Not far from home, but she hath lost her way,

all point beyond doubt to the poem written by Wordsworth when in Germany, and published in the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800.

There is yet one other piece of circumstantial evidence as to the identity of "Edmund" that has never to my knowledge been adduced. It occurs in a letter of Charles Lamb to Coleridge, bearing date October 9, 1802, five days (that is to say) after the appearance of the Ode in the *Morning Post*. The letter is in Latin, a freak in which Lamb occasionally indulged with Coleridge, Procter, Cary, and others of his more intimate

[1] [In the first versions the "graceful compliment" was not indirect: Otway was originally "William," and then "Edmund."]

correspondents. Thackeray once described those Latin letters of Sterne's, in which he delivered himself with such cynical frankness on his conjugal difficulties, as written in very "sad-dog" Latin. Lamb's corresponding use of that tongue is rather "jolly-dog" Latin, and its meaning in consequence not always easy to disentangle. But the following sentence is not obscure, though the Latinity may be doubtful:—

Istas Wordsworthianas nuptias (vel potius cujusdam *Edmundii* tui) te retulisse mirificum gaudeo:

which may be freely rendered, "I am awfully glad to receive your account of the marriage of Wordsworth (or perhaps I should rather say of a certain *Edmund* of yours)." Wordsworth had been married to Mary Hutchinson on October 4, the very day, it may be observed, on which Coleridge's poem appeared in the *Morning Post*. Here therefore, five days after Wordsworth's wedding, and the simultaneous appearance of Coleridge's poem addressed to his friend Edmund, we find Lamb making an allusion to the identity of the two, which cannot be mistaken. Finally, we are told by Professor Knight in his admirable Library Edition of Wordsworth (vol. iii. 423-4) that among the manuscripts at Coleorton is a copy of "Dejection," sent by Coleridge to Sir George Beaumont in April 1802, in which (presumably) first draft of all, the name used is not

Edmund, but Wordsworth's own, the famous couplet appearing thus :

> O William ! we receive but what we give ;
> And in our life alone does nature live.

The reasons which led Coleridge to substitute "Edmund" for "William," when six months later he sent the poem to his friend Stuart for the *Morning Post*, can only be matter for conjecture. Poetically, we may be well satisfied that the change was made. The name of "William" has seen many vicissitudes and received many humorous side-lights in the last half-century, and one of the most beautiful poems in the language would have suffered grievous wrong if it had been left to descend to us in its precise original form. Its author was as wise in changing the "William," as that William himself was in dropping "dear brother Jim" out of his pathetic "We are Seven." But no like injury would have been wrought by preserving the name "Edmund" as final. Moreover, in changing "William" for "Edmund" no change was made in the motive and purport of the poem. As Lamb, and doubtless all other friends of Coleridge and Wordsworth were aware, the ode was still addressed to Wordsworth. But the situation is altogether altered when, at some period within the next twelve years, Coleridge decided to remove as far as possible all traces of its original dedication, not only by substituting for "Edmund" the intangible and quite unrecog-

nisable impersonation "Lady," but by omitting those lines which had served most clearly to point out Wordsworth as the poet addressed. Why Coleridge took this course, and whether any friend at all was addressed as "Lady," there is no evidence to show. But the fact remains that, by the change of name and the omission of those passages, the historical interest of the ode, as bearing on the lives of Coleridge and Wordsworth, entirely disappears. For there is a history in the poem, as first framed, and one of the most pathetic in English literature.

When Coleridge wrote "Dejection" he was still short of completing his thirtieth year. He had lived at Keswick nearly two years, himself and family supported by the pension of £150 a year from the brothers Wedgwood, and by the payment for occasional essays and poems in the daily papers. His poetic prime was already past. "He had four poetical epochs," writes his son in the supplementary memoir of the *Biographia Literaria*, "which represented in some sort boyhood, youthful manhood, middle age, and the decline of life." The first of these extends to the year 1796. The second is comprised within some three years only, but in it the noblest fruits of Coleridge's genius were produced — "The Ancient Mariner," "The Dark Ladie," the first part of "Christabel," "Fears in Solitude," "Kubla Khan," the "Hymn in the Valley of Chamouni," and others of less note. The poems which succeed

open the third period of Coleridge's poetic life. "They are distinguished from those of my father's Stowey life," continues H. N. Coleridge, "by a less buoyant spirit. Poetic fire they have, but not the clear bright mounting flame of his earlier poetry. Their meditative vein is graver, and they seem tinged with the sombre hues of middle age; though some of them were written before the author was thirty-five years old. A characteristic poem of this period is 'Dejection,' an Ode composed at Keswick, April 4, 1802."

The near relatives of the poet here content themselves, as was natural, with this simple record of facts. It was enough for them to note that, for whatever reason, the "clear mounting flame" of his earlier poetry had ceased to rise. But later biographers, untrammelled by the family tie, have had to inquire into and account for this change, without fear or favour. Mr. Traill, in the best memoir of Coleridge that has yet appeared, says no more than the truth when he speaks of the period between 1800 and 1804 as "the turning-point, moral and physical, of Coleridge's career. The next few years determined not only his destiny as a writer, but his life as a man. Between his arrival at Keswick in the summer of 1800 and his departure for Malta in the spring of 1804, that fatal change of constitution, temperament, and habits which governed the whole of his subsequent history had fully established itself. Between these two dates he was trans-

formed from the Coleridge of whom his young fellow-students in Germany have left us so pleasing a picture, into the Coleridge whom distressed kinsmen, alienated friends, and a disappointed public were to have before them for the remainder of his days. Here then at Keswick, and in these first two or three years of the century—here or nowhere is the key to the melancholy mystery to be found."[1]

And this key, as every one now knows, is to be found in the habit of opium-eating which was begun during these first years (1800-1802) at Greta Hall. The exact date at which Coleridge found among the magazines in his neighbour's library an advertisement of the virtues of the "Kendal Black Drop,"[2] and thought of trying it as a possible cure for his rheumatic and gastric troubles, is not known. But Coleridge himself refers to the beginning of the year 1803 as being "soon after his eyes had been opened to the true nature of the habit into which he had been ignorantly deluded." It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that the consumption of the Kendal opiate had been going on for many months, when Coleridge at last discovered that he could not live without it, and that it had attained a fatal

[1] *Coleridge*: English Men of Letters Series.

[2] [Mr. J. Dykes Campbell pronounces this "Kendal Black Drop," of which Coleridge first spoke in 1826, to be mythical. He quotes a letter of April 22, 1832, in which Coleridge speaks of "a thirty-three years' fearful slavery," and adds that "long before 1799 he well knew the good and the bad effects of opiates."]

dominion over his mind and will. And if this were so, the mischief was at work, even though Coleridge little guessed its extent or cause, when the growing melancholy of his outlook found expression in these saddest of sad verses.

And the poem acquires, I think, a yet deeper pathos when we remember (what is effectually concealed in the version as afterwards modified) that it was to Wordsworth that Coleridge's thoughts turned, not only as the confidant of his griefs, but as supplying the most poignant contrast to his own condition and state of mind. When read with the name "Edmund" retained in it, and the few but deeply significant passages afterwards omitted, the ode becomes as interesting in its bearing upon Wordsworth as upon Coleridge. For the writer discerns in his friend just those qualities in which himself is wanting. Wordsworth was the elder man by some two years. He too was a poet and devoted to poetry; and looking to support by its means himself and the wife he was so soon going to bring home, his old friend and playfellow, Mary Hutchinson. He was poor, but contented to be poor. He had not yet reached his poetic prime—his powers were maturing daily. The "Excursion" and the "Prelude," the "Solitary Reaper" and the "Highland Girl," the "Ode on Immortality" and the "Ode to Duty" were yet to be. In all these respects, in character, temperament, in "the reason firm, the temperate will," as well as in the career which

lay before him, life and health permitting, Coleridge could not but recognise that his neighbour and dearest friend presented the strangest, saddest contrast to himself. The ode "Dejection" has been always recognised as a wonderfully true piece of self-presentment; but it is hardly less valuable as a tribute to the real secret of the strength which Coleridge saw maturing in another.

> I may not hope from outward forms to win
> The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

This is the keynote of the poem—"We receive but what we give." "From the soul itself must issue forth" the fair luminous cloud that envelops the earth. The writer had lost that "fair luminous cloud," never to regain it. But there was one friend, at least, to whom these hidden fountains of joy were no mystery,

> O pure of heart! *thou* need'st not ask of me
> What this strong music in the soul may be.

I have italicised the "thou," for so it clearly should be emphasised; and the "thou," it should never be forgotten, was William Wordsworth.

The first version of the ode is assuredly worthy of preservation if only for the exquisite lines in the last stanza, afterwards necessarily omitted when the Lady (whoever she may have been) was substituted for the person originally addressed:

> O Edmund, friend of my devoutest choice;
> O raised from anxious dread and busy care
> By the immenseness of the good and fair
> Which thou see'st everywhere.

No lines, as telling the secret of Wordsworth's unique power, are better worth rescuing from oblivion. And here, too, the contrast between Coleridge and his friend which pervades the poem, is indicated beyond question. The "anxious dread" and the "busy care" were already beginning to work their ravages upon Coleridge's own heart and spirit, and "the immenseness of the good and fair" no longer prevailed against them.

Wordsworth, "friend of his devoutest choice," must have read these lines in their earliest shape, when he was addressed in them by his actual name. He did not then know about the opium. None of Coleridge's nearest and dearest seem to have known till years afterwards of the subtle enemy that he was "putting into his mouth" to steal away, if not his brains, assuredly his self-control and his peace of mind. But Wordsworth must have seen that things were going wrong with his friend, and that this poem was only too literal a transcript of the writer's own mood. How it affected Wordsworth directly, how far it influenced the current of his own thoughts, is only a matter of conjecture. There was no declared or obvious poetic response to it on his part. There is indeed one memorable portrait drawn by Wordsworth of his friend, and it belongs to this year, though the exact date is not fixed. The "Lines written in my own copy of the 'Castle of Indolence,'" supply the well-known portrait of "the noticeable man with large grey eyes"—the

pale face that seemed "as if a blooming face it ought to be"—and the low-hung lip "deprest by weight of musing Phantasy." The picture was drawn out of doors, and from the life, as Wordsworth informed Miss Fenwick: "Composed in the orchard, Town-end, Grasmere, Coleridge living much with us at this time." But though there is an atmosphere of melancholy thrown over the picture, it is made also to envelop Wordsworth himself, who is described in the opening stanzas of the poem. The sombre colouring is primarily intended to harmonise with that of Thomson's poem which suggested it, and with that series of cabinet portraits which those of Wordsworth and Coleridge are designed to supplement. The orchard at Town-end was their "Castle of Indolence." But there is yet another poem of Wordsworth's, written just one month after Coleridge's Ode, supplying so startling a commentary upon it that I cannot think it a mere coincidence. On May 7, 1802, Wordsworth wrote his "Leech-gatherer, or, Resolution and Independence." This poem, like so many of the rest, was suggested by an actual incident. "The Leech-gatherer," so Wordsworth himself tells us, "I met a few hundred yards from my cottage, and the account of him is taken from his own mouth." But this was not a then recent incident. It was eighteen months before, in October 1800, according to Dorothy Wordsworth, that she and her brother had met the old Leech-gatherer. "He was of Scotch

parents, but had been born in the army. He had had a wife 'and a good woman, and it pleased God to bless him with ten children.' All these were dead but one, of whom he had not heard for many years, a sailor. His trade was to gather leeches; but now leeches were scarce, and he had not strength for it." Why was it that just eighteen months after, Wordsworth was moved to repeat the old man's story and all he had learned from it?

We cannot say, and it is never well to be dogmatic. But the deeply touching appropriateness of this poem as a comment upon Coleridge's "Ode to Wordsworth," then fresh in that friend's memory, need not be ignored merely because nothing can be proved. Here, as in the ode, the contrast between Joy and Despondency is the pervading thought. The poet describes himself as travelling upon the moor, "as happy as a boy," drawing happiness from all the joyful creatures within sight and sound:

> But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
> Of joy in minds that can no further go,
> As high as we have mounted in delight
> In our dejection do we sink as low;
> To me that morning did it happen so:
> And fears and fancies thick upon me came;
> Dim sadness—and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name.

Happiness may not endure: it may be succeeded by a very different day:

> Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.

And then follows the strange confession, so little true of Wordsworth, but so curiously and almost pointedly true of the author of "Dejection," the ode then just before sent to him:

> My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought,
> As if life's business were a summer mood;
> As if all needful things would come unsought
> To genial faith, still rich in genial good:
> But how can he expect that others should
> Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
> Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all.

The noble stanza that follows, recalling Chatterton and Burns, there is no need to quote (for who does not know it?)—but the line,

> By our own spirits are we deified,

may be cited as summing up, in the magical terseness that belongs to Wordsworth's diction at its best, the moral of Coleridge's Ode. It is the echo of

> O Edmund! we receive but what we give.

But there the parallel between the two poems begins and ends. The moral of the one, even as its title, is Resolution and Independence: the meaning of the other, as poor Coleridge was just awakening to discover, was Irresolution and Dependence. Coleridge was losing not only the "shaping spirit of Imagination," never more to be recovered, but something of far greater importance to his life. And the two things he felt thus

slipping hopelessly away were his power of moral resolve, and the necessary instinct of not leaving wife and children a burden upon others.

> O well for him whose will is strong!
> . . . . .
> But ill for him who, bettering not with time,
> Corrupts the strength of heaven-descended Will,
> And ever weaker grows thro' acted crime
> Or seeming-genial venial fault,
> Recurring and suggesting still!
> He seems as one whose footsteps halt,
> Toiling in immeasurable sand,
> And o'er a weary sultry land,
> Far beneath a blazing vault,
> Sown in a wrinkle of the monstrous hill
> The city sparkles like a grain of salt.

It may, or may not have been, simple coincidence that the address to this "friend of his devoutest choice" was first printed on the very day, October 4, 1802, of that friend's marriage; but it certainly gives an additional poignancy to the confessions therein contained. It may never be ascertained, as I have said, why Coleridge, when he first admitted the ode into the collection of his acknowledged poems, the *Sibylline Leaves*, in 1817, deposed the name of his old friend, omitted the lines that most significantly described him, and substituted the vague and unrecognisable name of "Lady." Should there be letters of Coleridge still existing which would throw light on the matter, Mr. Dykes Campbell, or other devout students of the poet, may yet discover something

of interest on the subject. We know that an estrangement grew up between the two friends after these early days. Even had Wordsworth been without his defects (and he was "no such perfect thing"), this was inevitable; and this may account for the revised version of the poem which still retained its original name of "Dejection." But more probably, I think, Coleridge desired to conceal from the general reader some of the more painful personal allusions and contrasts discoverable in the original version. Poetically, the ode has not suffered by the change. But as a contribution to the autobiography of one great poet, and a tribute of genuine admiration to another, the poem as first conceived will always have a peculiar interest to the student of Coleridge and Wordsworth.

THE DEATH OF TENNYSON

IT may not be quite easy to answer the apparently simple question, what it is that the world loses in the death of a great poet such as he who has just passed away. For our poet was, like Lear, "fourscore and upwards," and we could not have hoped for much, if any, absolutely new fruit of his genius. It is not as when men have had bitterly to reflect, in losing a Shelley or a Keats, a Mozart or a Schubert, that they were burying in the grave not only a fair possession, but "yet fairer hopes," that the voice was mute, and the wondrous imagination numbed for ever, while powers were yet in fullest vigour, or even not yet matured. And still we say—it must have been repeated ten thousand times during the last month—that we are the poorer for our loss. Yet Lord Tennyson (one shrinks even now from calling him Tennyson only, and so confessing that he has gone to the majority) has taken nothing away with him of all his splendid work. All that has made us wiser, better, happier, in his poetry is with us still, and nothing can take it from us,

though changes may too easily come upon men affecting their own attitude towards that poetry.

Of course, in one real and most deep sense we are all, as individuals, mourning a private and personal bereavement. And our grief is easily accounted for. No one of those to whom his poetry has been among the greatest blessings of their lives (and such are to be numbered by thousands and tens of thousands) can have failed, though his eyes never beheld the poet, to love him as a dear friend unseen. But apart from personal loss, there still remains a meaning which we understand when we say that the English-speaking world, our English race, feels the poorer for this event. It dispirits and discourages us, because we feel that the last of a long line has departed, and we are anxious and uneasy as to possibilities of the future. Are there any other poets, prophets, teachers, of the same rank in store for us? For those who are least anxious, perhaps least able, to analyse and compare, are certain that their instinct does not deceive them when they recognise in Tennyson something different in kind, as well as in degree, from all the many accomplished and musical writers of verse, who in their turn and for their purpose interest and please us.

It is indeed difficult to find the right word that shall define the difference here pointed to. "Originality," "individuality," "distinction," all are inadequate, though all are component parts.

The poet may display all these and yet fail in taking hold of the reader, in bewitching, in fascinating. There is the word "charm," akin to "bewitch," that brings us something nearer to what we seek. The old and obsolete word "take," so dear to the Elizabethans, meant nearly the same thing:

> Daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty.

The familiar lines supply us with a suggestion at least of what Tennyson's poetry has been to those who love him. His diction haunts us, and gladdens and purifies while it haunts. And this it is which makes him, with whatever other immense differences, so Shakspearian. His verse is so human, while also so bewitching and so haunting. As an artist in verbal expression he ranks with Shelley and Keats. Yet while for all the best verse of those poets our admiration never wanes, that admiration rarely warms into affection, and its appeal is therefore to the lesser number. It bewitches, but only now and again it moves. Keats's autumn

> Season of mist and mellow fruitfulness

is as Tennysonian perhaps as anything that a poet of marked individuality ever produced, and it *moves* us within its limits, but not within Tennyson's. When we recall the latter's greatest

triumphs in the school of landscape painting,—as in the lines:

> Unwatched, the garden bough shall sway,
> The tender blossom flutter down;
> Unloved, that beech will gather brown,
> This maple burn itself away!
>
> Unloved, the sunflower, shining fair,
> Ray round with flames her disc of seed;
> And many a rose-carnation feed
> With summer spice the humming air—

it is always because such descriptions are in close touch with man, his sorrows, his hopes, his eternal destiny. The "unwatched, unloved" imports a new beauty, and a poignant pathos, into the summer garden. It is this quality in Tennyson that has endeared him perhaps more than any other English poet to the heart of his fellows:

> Mentem mortalia tangunt.

And this, too, has secured his fame beyond (as we believe) the possibility of a reversal of the judgment so unanimous to-day. It had fallen to the lot of Lord Tennyson, living to his great age, to watch the fluctuations of his own reputation, and to see the pendulum after some few movements all but cease to move. For he could look back upon sixty years of his life's work, from the little volume (so precious to us now) of 1830, which among much that was elvish and fantastic, much that was redolent of Keats, much that

showed the young poet to be not yet emancipated from the thrall of the poets he most loved, yet bore manifest witness that a new voice, and no echo, was speaking to ears that could hear. For did it not contain "Mariana in the Moated Grange"? From that date to the day when "Crossing the Bar" proved that the lyric poet had lost nothing of his cunning, and had gained something deeper, more divine than cunning, Lord Tennyson had watched the variations of poetical taste and opinion. We, his readers, have watched them also, in ourselves and in one another. Many a reader has, I believe, known what it is to lose something of his first love (not without sorrow, as for a lost illusion), and then later to have returned to his allegiance, acknowledging with humiliation that the cause had lain in himself. We have known men confess that their early enthusiasm had once suffered reaction. They had listened to voices crying, "All this is too suave, too polished in style, too conservative, too orthodox, too timid in politics or religious outlook, too decorous, too little adventurous in the treatment of human passion. We want more freedom, less fear, in those who would help to regenerate mankind." They had been called to admire this and that new voice which seemed to satisfy these various conditions, and for a while they followed what they believed to be some nobler guide, some more inspiring force. But, by and by, they had come to find that the

new could not do for them what the old had done. They were neither happier nor stronger for the change, and when they returned they found that the teacher who had won their earlier love was greater than they had known. So true is it that second thoughts are not always best, but rather (as the master himself said), "third, which are a riper first."

It is significant that Tennyson never exposed himself to the charge of political apostasy which has so often been brought against Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey; a charge which, though Browning gave it the support of his great authority, must be pronounced shallow and unphilosophical. There are no indications, I think, that Tennyson ever dreamed such dreams as the French Revolution had opened to the young poets of the previous generation. When Tennyson was young, that "dawn" in which Wordsworth found it "bliss to be alive," had long passed, and had broadened into a day wherein most men confessed the ruin of many cherished hopes, and were learning sterner and sadder lessons. But whatever the events in the actual contemporary history of his country that served to mould Tennyson's views, there is reason to believe that his political bias was mostly determined by the great thinkers on whom he had earliest trained himself, and especially by the great poets—and the greatest of all, Shakspeare. This influence upon Tennyson opens too large a

theme to be treated here. Sufficient now to note that while he shared the divine Shakspearian sympathy with all classes, from highest to lowest, and "felt with king and peasant alike," he yet (like Shakspeare) recognised no virtue either in "classes" or "masses," save as they were made wise through justice, reverence, and self-denial. That Shakspeare's own attitude towards the "mob" was somewhat scornful, that there was a strong vein of the so-called aristocrat in that Warwickshire farmer's son, has often been inferred, and perhaps justly, so far as one may penetrate his dramatic disguise and read the real man. It was not in this, if it existed, that Tennyson followed him; but rather in the quality just before mentioned, of insight into the true source of national greatness, freedom based upon moral discipline. When our later poet seems to speak with bitterness of "brainless mobs," the "red fool-fury of the Seine," and the like, it is with the deep conviction that the unwisdom of the mob is not one jot more respectable than the unwisdom of any rank above them. Unrighteousness and self-seeking at either extremity of the scale, these he finds most reason to fear—

> Till crowds at length be sane, and crowns be just

Even in the "smooth-faced, snub-nosed rogue" of "Maud" there is nothing of scorn, nothing of the misanthrope. For the speaker in the poem is himself yearning for a time when "self shall be

annulled" in the presence of a dire common necessity. He trusts that a war, most dreadful of all remedies, may draw men together and make them feel their true unity, because then they most "need one another." It is noteworthy that on a like occasion Shakspeare puts into a dozen words almost the whole moral of Tennyson's poem. Only he places them, for his purpose, in the mouth of his arch-cynic. When Falstaff is recruiting from among the most degenerate and worthless of his fellows, he styles them "the cankers of a calm world and a long peace." And being a cynic, he recognises no possible redeeming power in the war that was coming. He perceives in the useless of the world only "Food for powder, food for powder!"

In the volume *Demeter and Other Poems*, which the writer, then past his eightieth year, apparently believed would be his last gift to the world—the volume which ended with "Crossing the Bar"—appeared also "Merlin and The Gleam," and it was fitting that these two poems should appear together as companions, for while "Crossing the Bar" was the humble and hopeful outlook of the man towards the future, in "Merlin and The Gleam" we have a retrospect of his whole poetic life. The poem is difficult, and enigmatical, but not hopelessly so to those who may have followed with any care the same history as illustrated by the volumes in their order. For in it we read of a magician nearing

his own life's end, and feeling that he has a lesson to leave to the younger mariner just about to embark on the uncertain deep, and watching him with anxious and perhaps envious glance. He tells the young mariner how in his first youth the Wizard found him at sunrise, and woke him, and "learned him magic,"—and the Wizard can be no other than the Spirit of Poetry who found the youthful Burns at the plough and threw the prophet's mantle around him. But the Wizard taught him more than magic; he taught him to have an ideal and to pursue it. "Follow The Gleam"; he obeys the call and accepts the poet's function. But soon come discouragement and disappointment. Criticism crosses his path, and says him nay.

> A barbarous people
> Blind to the magic,
> And deaf to the melody,
> Snarl'd at and cursed me.
> A demon vext me,
> The light retreated,
> The landskip darken'd,
> The melody deaden'd.

But throughout all, the clearer voice never ceased to whisper, "Be of better cheer, believe in your Ideal"—

> The Master whispered
> 'Follow The Gleam.'

And the gleam fell in turn upon many varied objects, alluring the young poet—the fantastical,

the romantic, the supernatural; but not less so, as these one by one lost their charm, the simple joys and sorrows of simple men. Sections iv. and v. of the poem have their counterpart and their commentary in the lovely lines from the prologue to *Peter Bell*, where Wordsworth replies to the "little boat," that would fain carry him away to realms of Faery, far removed from this world and its pursuits:

> Long have I loved what I behold,
> The night that calms, the day that cheers;
> The common growth of mother earth
> Suffices me—her tears, her mirth,
> Her humblest mirth and tears.

Over all these in turn the Light shone, leading him on through his quickened interest in man to the ideal hero of Romance, Arthur the blameless king—when at this juncture,

> Clouds and darkness
> Closed upon Camelot;
> Arthur had vanish'd
> I knew not whither,
> The king who loved me
> And cannot die.

It is surely not daring, to suppose that the poet here blends in thought the Arthur of legend with that other Arthur—the Arthur of "In Memoriam," his own closest friend and brother, the "man he held as half divine"—and that he thus shadows forth how love and sorrow for such a friend not only for the while threw fictitious tears and

imaginary ideals into the shade, but filled heaven and earth henceforward with new meanings, and himself almost with a new-born faith and hope. The cloud that had fallen on Camelot lifted once again, never to return.

> The Gleam, that had waned to a wintry glimmer
> On icy fallow
> And faded forest,
> Drew to the valley
> Named of the shadow,
> And slowly brightening
> Out of the glimmer,
> And slowly moving again to a melody
> Yearningly tender,
> Fell on the shadow,
> No longer a shadow,
> But clothed with The Gleam.

Is it being wise above what is written to pluck out the heart of the poet's mystery? Yet the poem is clearly autobiographical; it could not have been meant as an ingenious riddle; it is written in the poet's very heart's blood. He must have wished those who had long studied him with heart and brain, with reverence and love, through the changing experiences of his career, to find in it some key to questions they had asked and problems that had baffled them. The actual material for its interpretation is in the hands of us all. The two earliest volumes, neglected or mocked by all but a discerning few; the long interval of silence between 1833 and 1842; the second volume of the edition of 1842 with the

"Morte d'Arthur," and the "Two Voices" (significantly dated 1833, the year of Hallam's death); "In Memoriam" in 1850—with these and other clues in mind (not forgetting "Maud" in 1855), it is possible to read with something like confidence the story and the lesson of this unique confession.

Very touching is it as bearing on Tennyson's lifelong devotion to Shakspeare, that as almost the most perfect poem in the little volume of 1830, "Mariana," sprang from a single phrase in *Measure for Measure*, so Shakspeare was the last volume to fall from his hands when "life and thought" were ebbing from him. The lines from *Cymbeline* to which, as it seemed, he wished to direct those around his bed, convey little meaning divorced from their context, but in their place they had been always a special joy to him. He had called them the "tenderest repartee" in all Shakspeare, and few will dissent from his judgment. When the much-injured, much-suffering Imogen is restored to her husband's arms, she asks him in delicate rebuke whether he will ever again hazard such an experiment as had all but wrecked two lives for ever:

> Why did you throw your wedded lady from you?

and, on the word, she flings her arms round her husband, and challenges him, half-passionately, half-playfully, to repeat his error:

> Think that you are upon a rock; and now
> Throw me again!

It is here that the noble and beautiful retort is uttered, making husband and wife once more, and for ever, one:

> Hang there, like fruit, my soul,
> Till the tree die!

Who can doubt that the criticism thus for the last time reiterated, was more than a criticism, that it was a farewell message to one with whom his thoughts were busy to the end; one "near, dear, and true," who to the dying tree was still the fruit nearest and dearest?

> No truer Time himself
> Can prove you, tho' he make you evermore
> Nearer and dearer, as the rapid of life
> Shoots to the fall.

And thus has passed away from among us the wielder of the most wide-reaching, beneficent, spiritual influence in our later literature. Our Arthur has vanished, but "he cannot die." If his failing eyes rested, while the leaves of *Cymbeline* were turned, upon the familiar dirge, he must have taken courage from the lines,

> Thou thy worldly task hast done,
> Home art gone and ta'en thy wages.

For to him the highest wages of noble verse, even as of virtue, was

> The glory of going on,—and still to be.

THE SECRET OF CHARM IN LITERATURE

In the Memoir of Lord Tennyson it is recorded that the poet once consulted the present President of Magdalen College, Oxford, as to the exact force of the line in the *Ars Poetica* which says that it is not sufficient that poems should be beautiful — *dulcia sunto*. Mr. Warren replied, that he supposed it to mean "they must have charm." A more felicitous rendering could hardly have been given, and it is to this quality of "charm" that Horace himself owes his continued influence over the educated reader. For we still are agreed as to what the word means when used of imaginative literature and of the arts generally, notwithstanding the depths of bathos that the word has sounded when applied in the ordinary converse of life. We are weary, indeed, when we hear persons describe as "charming" some trumpery new novel that came into existence yesterday, and will pass out of it to-morrow; and still more when

the term is applied to some new acquaintance of good social standing. But this decadence of meaning has not yet destroyed the force of the word when applied to those works of art which retain their hold over our affections as well as over our admiration. For this seems to represent the distinction Horace meant to express. Poems may become classical by virtue of many other qualities commanding admiration; but without "charm" they will not be turned to again and again for refreshment. They may continue to fly *per ora*, but not *per corda virûm*.

Horace does not put one excellence in opposition to another. He implies that a poem must have both. It is not enough that the poem is beautiful; it must have something beside—the quality of sweetness—of giving pleasure. Beauty may be said to include those of imagination and of style. What does the *dulce* include? And if its presence is essential to the poem, it must be also to all imaginative literature designed to please —prose as well as poetry; the romance and the essay as well as the poem. Let us take as an example an essayist who has survived many generations and fluctuations of popular taste. Most critics, if asked, would admit that Addison has lived and become a classic by virtue of the union of imagination, humour, and style with the (for the moment) undefined quality of "charm." Yet it is notable that a very eminent critic, Matthew Arnold, denies to Addison the rank of

a classic, and, strangely enough, for the reason that he was not a profound moral thinker.

"Addison," he says, "claims to take leading rank as a moralist," and then he proceeds to point out that this is absurd, for "his ideas were commonplace." But who, it must be asked, ever made this claim for Addison? Certainly not Addison himself, though he and his friend Steele prided themselves, with some reason, that they first brought moral questions and moral thoughtfulness down from the study of the philosopher to the lady's boudoir. Nor must it be overlooked that moral truisms of to-day were not so much commonplaces a hundred and seventy years ago. But the really startling position taken up by Matthew Arnold is that he practically denies to such qualities as fancy, humour, style, the right to make their possessor a classic, unless there is some other gift which he did not claim, and which his admirers have never (as far as the present writer is aware) claimed for him. The precedent of Horace might surely have occurred to the critic. Horace moralises, but certainly never took "leading rank" as a moralist. But he lives by virtue of many qualities that Addison also shared, and in their combination with the undefined quality of the *dulce* they constitute "charm."

And yet it is certain that in the presence of the moral element the charm of both these writers alike consists. Certainly not in any moral platitudes, or the insistence on moral obligations, but

in the human element—the ear that hears the "still sad music of humanity" and responds to it. But this human touch must be genuine, else that which when real is the fountain of charm, becomes the most repellent and nauseous of draughts. We then call it sentiment, or, in its advanced stage, "sentimentality." The first condition of charm is that the human element shall not be "the lucrative gift of tears."

Sooner or later the world, for the most part, detects the false in such matters, though in some instances of men of real genius, such as Sterne, opinion remains always in a state of flux. But it is easy to make mistakes in our judgments of sentimentalism. Take the instances of Thackeray and Dickens, our stock sentimental prose writers of the past century. Both, in their widely different ways, deal in pathetic characters and situations. Yet the pathos of these two writers affects their admirers very differently. It is customary to-day to treat the pathos of Dickens with unmixed scorn. We hear persons cite the death of little Nell or Paul Dombey almost with a shudder, as if what was tawdry and unreal in the description of these incidents put them beyond the pale of criticism. It may freely be admitted that the imperfect art in these and other passages of Dickens lessens, or even ruins, the pleasure which educated persons might have derived from them. But the mistake is sometimes made of confusing this obvious limitation with unreality. It comes

to be assumed that because Dickens's pathos is inartistic, therefore it was not real. And when we are told by himself or his biographers that after writing such passages he was so heart-sore that he walked about the streets all night inconsolable, persons are tempted to wonder whether this is not part of the affectation detected in the writing. But this is surely unfair. There can be no reason to doubt the sincerity of his emotion or to compare two things essentially different. The defects we note are intellectual, or, rather, are the result of imperfect education. In many departments of the novelist's craft, Dickens's controlling models were not the masters of fiction he studied as a boy, but rather the methods and diction of the theatre. The stage was during his whole life Dickens's chief literary passion ; and when in the development of his plots he approached human crises, he was often unmistakably under the influence of the melodramatic. But though this defect in his art does not make his pathos the less sincere, it is often fatal to charm. It is not always so with Dickens. There is a passage in the *Christmas Carol* (where the Cratchitt family are making up their scanty mourning clothes for tiny Tim) absolutely unspoiled by bad art. On this occasion there is the reticence of the artist as well as human truth of feeling—and the result is pathos with charm. Thackeray, whose literary and artistic preparation for his craft was as complete as Dickens's was defective, knew the value

of brevity and concentration, and the death of Colonel Newcome remains unassailed by the critics of sentiment.

From prose let us turn to poetry, to which Horace specially referred. It is an instructive process to turn the pages of Mr. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*. The little volume includes many poems indeed of which charm cannot be predicated. For a poem to have become a classic, it is not necessary that it should charm. Other qualities may have given it the salt which keeps alive. Now and again in Mr. Palgrave's selection we come upon a poem—let us say such as Collins's *Ode to the Passions*, which we respect as the work of a man indubitably a poet, but which, because it hardly touches a human chord, has become fatally old-fashioned. If we seek the charm of the human in Collins we must turn from such an elaborate structure as the *Ode* to the elegy on the death of Thomson. The contrast well illustrates the difference between being a classic and *respected*, and having charm and being *remembered*. Yet as we pass from poem to poem in the collection, notably in the third and fourth sections, there are scarcely any which are not essentially pathetic, whatever be the topic treated. Whether the poet is Scott, Burns, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Moore, Campbell, Lamb, or Hood, the charm of his verse lies in the unconcealable presence of human sympathy. And it has made the essence of the poem's attractiveness and therefore of its permanence.

There is a meditative pathos—quite distinct from that attaching to death or sorrow—the pathos belonging to human life as a whole, which colours the vast majority of these poems. Is not this the *dulce* to which the Latin poet refers? And is not sadness inevitably inherent in all sweetness that endures?

> So sad, so sweet, the days that are no more.

But here again it may be asked what is to decide, however brilliant the talent and consummate the style, whether the sentiment of a poem is sincere, or whether it is only a skilful theatrical effect—Thackeray's "lucrative gift of tears" over again, and whether we should find any charm in it, if its author were suspected of unreality. Surely this question is one of degree. Mr. Coventry Patmore, in one of the sanest and most acute of his prose essays, strongly opposes a view, popular of late, that the value of a poet's teaching is absolutely irrespective of the poet's own private character. Mr. Patmore proposed what he thought a crucial test of this theory. He said that Byron might quite well have written (had he been in the humour) Wordsworth's lines:

> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

It was a bit of sentiment of which Byron was certainly capable. But had he written the lines, would they (Mr. Patmore asks) have affected us

at all in the same way or degree as they have done when they formed the conclusion of Wordsworth's ode? And he answers the question in the negative, and maintains that the lines take their value and their pathos from our unconscious comparison of them with Wordsworth's poetry as a whole, and even from our reading them in the light of Wordsworth's life and career. There is much to be said for Mr. Patmore's contention. Mr. Patmore no doubt chooses a rather extreme case as his illustration. Wordsworth and Byron are, perhaps, antipodean in their purposes as in their methods.

But the question is, how far can such a canon of criticism be extended to poets in general? We all find charm, for instance, in Goldsmith. Ought we to suspect its genuineness because its author was vain, and a Bohemian? We find charm in Thomas Moore, though in his best-known songs some of it may spring from the pathos of the melodies to which he set them. Should we deny the charm because Moore was a drawing-room sentimentalist, and drew tears from impressionable dowagers, besides showing many weaknesses of character? We are not offended by this, nor raise the cry of hypocrisy or sham. The charm belongs to the writer's individuality; to the genuineness of his instincts, of what he "sees and approves," though he may have failed to attain it in his life.

A sense of the pathetic in life and sympathy

with it, from these springs the impulse which generates charm. Mr. Lowell called "style" the one true "antiseptic" of literature. And doubtless style has kept both prose and poetry alive. Style alone will place and preserve a literary composition in the ranks of the classics. But there is something else required to make verse read again and again, and to enshrine it in our memories; and it must be to this that Horace pointed, and this which sustained his hope that he would not "all die." How much of the poetry of to-day will survive by virtue of the presence of the *dulce* is a question not here to be discussed. We are living in an age when consummate technique and mastery of metrical effect in verse are attained in unprecedented degree. To what extent will these merits secure permanence of attraction after the first tribute of applause has been paid?

THE INFLUENCE OF CHAUCER UPON HIS SUCCESSORS

I

A RECENT review in the *Pilot* has reminded its readers of the care that is being bestowed by scholars upon the text of Chaucer's poems. Through the labours of experts, and in England notably of Professor Skeat, we are to-day in a position to separate Chaucer's genuine work from that of his disciples and imitators with a certainty hitherto unattained. But the ordinary reader and lover of Chaucer, who cannot appreciate the skill by which this result has been reached, through the study of divergences in dialect and in laws of rhyme and rhythm, may be more interested perhaps in tracing the rise or fall of Chaucer's popularity during the last five centuries. Is the noteworthy revival of Chaucer's poetry during the last few years really a rediscovery, a renascence, or has he always been a significant force and influence in English poetry, though he himself may have been little read?

Putting aside such charming imitations of Chaucer as the *Flower and the Leaf*, which so long passed for the master's own, the influence of Chaucer in England during the 150 years that followed his death was not apparent. Indeed, except for satirical verses of Lydgate and Skelton, and a number of ballads, such as the *Robin Hood Cycle*, *Chevy Chase*, the *Nut-brown Maid*, and the like, there was nothing of note in poetry produced in England. The Chaucerian influence worked in Scotland, in the royal author of the *King's Quhair*, and in the poems of Henryson, Dunbar, and David Lindsay of the Mount. These had all drunk of the Chaucerian stream, and James of Scotland definitely announced himself as a disciple of the Englishman. And even in England, though there is little outward resemblance to Chaucer in such ballads as the *Nut-brown Maid*, it may well have been that the humanity and geniality of their themes—"familiar matter of to-day," in place of worn-out themes of chivalry—were the result of a change of taste in which Chaucer had a main share. And we must not overlook that when the printing press had really come to stay, the *Canterbury Tales* was amongst the earliest books printed by Caxton. And it is further significant of Chaucer's popularity that some time after Caxton had first printed the *Tales* he discovered a more accurate manuscript and proceeded to set up the type afresh.

When the drama was first elaborated out of the Miracle and Morality, the Interlude and the History, by the genius of Lyly and Greene and Marlowe, and was ripe for the master-hand of Shakspeare, Chaucerian subjects were in demand. *Patient Grissel* was one; and there were at least two dramas on the theme of Palamon and Arcite. Then Shakspeare, besides the use he made of the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, built his Troilus and Cressida mainly on the material he found in Chaucer's splendid poem. And the non-dramatic writers of the same period are at one in honouring Chaucer's immense services to poetry. Philip Sidney is one of such. Spenser is full of Chaucer, and indeed was, in an important respect, the worse for him. Recognising the charm of Chaucer's archaic English, it occurred to him to write the *Faerie Queene* in a selection from Chaucer's vocabulary and grammar. But, as it was only a portion, it became a strange blend such as never was in the King's English, or any other; and Ben Jonson, with his robust frankness, said no more than the truth when he remarked that in the *Faerie Queene* Spenser wrote "no language." Meantime, Chaucer was being read. There were fresh editions of him in 1542, 1546, 1555, 1598. Yet at this last-named date there are proofs that, with the general reader at least, Chaucer was being reckoned old-fashioned. Daniel, in his *Musophilus* (1599) pays him a noble tribute, while sorrowfully admitting the fact that his day

was all but over. The lover of the Muses instances Chaucer as one

> who yet lives, and yet shall,
> Though (which I grieve to say) but in his last,

which can only mean, "on his last legs"—one who, by the lover of the euphuistic and the metaphysical, was likely to be long neglected. But a few lines later on, with the insight of a true poet, Daniel recognises how such greatness as Chaucer's cannot be long hidden. What is unreal will perish, what is based upon nature and truth will emerge from neglect:

> The stronger constitutions shall
> Wear out th' infection of distempered days
> And come with glory to out-live this Fall,
> Recovering of another Spring of Praise,
> Cleared from th' oppressing humours wherewithal
> The idle multitude surcharge their lays.

Milton, as we know, read Chaucer with delight, and felt the archaic charm of old-fashioned words, which must have been in his own time obsolete save in remote country places—"yclept," and "hight," and "buxom," and the "swinkt hedger"; and in the *Penseroso* he makes quite a long-drawn-out reference to the one tale in the Canterbury series that evidently charmed him most:

> Call up him who left half told
> The story of Cambuscan bold;

though it was in the *Allegro* rather than in its

companion-poem that Milton showed most plainly the lasting influence of his predecessor. The gaiety of the *Allegro* is thoroughly Chaucerian. What has been called Chaucer's "lightsomeness" appears afresh in Milton's "hedge-row elms" and "meadows trim with daisies pied."

In the Stuart era, however, Chaucer's fame was not in the ascendant. His was too simple a food for the gradually corrupting taste of the age. The gaiety of Suckling and Lovelace and Herrick is charming, but it is not exactly that of Chaucer. When Dryden arose, he was too true a poet not to recognise another great one in Chaucer, and yet he showed his limitations as a critic by rewriting choice pieces, such as the *Knight's Tale*, and the *Flower and the Leaf* (then accepted as Chaucer's), in late seventeenth-century diction with a vengeance! In this diction every trace of Chaucer's individuality disappears. Dryden actually begins his version of the "poure Personne of a toun" as follows:

> A parish priest was of the pilgrim train,
> An awful, reverend, and religious man:
> His eyes diffused a venerable grace
> And Charity itself was in his face.

And yet such was the interest of Chaucer's themes (though style and manner were gone) that Dryden's *Fables*, as they were called, came to be among the most popular of his writings.

The spell of Dryden's own genius and of the rhymed heroic couplet, on which Pope was to leave

an impress so long disastrous to originality, left Chaucer in his native dress still further neglected. And it was not until the close of the last century that the romantic revival started by the Percy *Reliques* in England and by Bürger in Germany again directed attention to a forgotten poet. One of the first results of this reawakening of interest was a new and for the first time critical edition of Chaucer by Tyrwhitt, who edited the *Canterbury Tales*, in 1775, and, strangely enough, for the first time sought to show that Chaucer wrote on regular metrical systems, which only changes in the pronunciation of words after his time had obscured.

During the century that has since passed, Chaucer's fame, not only with editors and critics, has steadily grown, and his true place in our literature been recognised. All the great poets of the poetical renascence of the early years of the century were devoted Chaucerians—Scott, Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, Keats, and later Tennyson and Morris. We all know Keats's sonnet on the "Flower and the Leaf" (which is Chaucerian to the core), in which he cries: "Oh! what a power has white simplicity"; and S. T Coleridge in his *Table Talk* has left us a charming tribute to the poet. "I take increasing delight in Chaucer. His manly cheerfulness is especially delicious to me in my old age. How exquisitely tender he is, and yet how perfectly free from the least touch of sickly melancholy or morbid

drooping! The sympathy of the poet with the subjects of his poetry is particularly remarkable in Shakspeare and Chaucer; but what the first effects by a strong act of imagination and mental metamorphosis, the last does without any effort, merely by the inborn kindly joyousness of his nature. How well do we seem to know Chaucer! How absolutely nothing do we know of Shakspeare." And Tennyson has given more than one proof of the influence over him of Chaucer. His *Dream of Fair Women* was avowedly suggested by Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, over which the later poet falls asleep, as Chaucer over Ovid's Romauns in the *Book of the Duchess*:

> I read, before my eyelids dropt their shade,
> "*The Legend of Good Women.*"

And yet, while the poets were reading and drawing inspiration from their great predecessor, the general reading public (even of those who thought they liked poetry) seems to have held aloof. A chief cause of this was the general impression that Chaucer was indeed a kind of "freak," or *lusus naturæ*, who had done marvellously well in a barbarous age, but that his claims could not be taken seriously in a later stage of civilisation. Another cause, no doubt, was that the very look of his page, with its uncouth spelling and obsolete words and grammar, repelled the reader at his first advance. Then again, as to his purely literary merits, even so good a critic as Addison

had firmly declared against him. "Age," he wrote,

> had rusted what the poet writ,
> Worn out his language, and obscured his wit.

And, long after, Hartley Coleridge, probably with these lines of Addison in his mind, sarcastically reiterated the objection:

> For how shall such old-fashioned lingo cope
> With polish, elegance, and Mister Pope?

THE INFLUENCE OF CHAUCER UPON HIS SUCCESSORS

II

WE have seen that up to nearly the middle of this century Chaucer, in the original, remained practically unread, and was supposed unreadable, and no one had seriously come to the would-be reader's relief. But in the year 1841 a small band of poets, headed by R. H. Horne, the author of *Orion*, addressed themselves to the task of "modernising" certain poems of Chaucer with a view to stimulate the taste for that poet, and encourage readers to master his difficulties for themselves. In this enterprise there were associated with Horne, among others, Wordsworth, Elizabeth Barrett, and Leigh Hunt. Wordsworth's contribution to the volume was the *Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, and a small portion of *Troilus and Cressida*. These had been modernised by the poet as far back as 1801, together with the *Prioress's Tale*, which he had already included among his published poems in 1820. In a letter

to Professor Henry Reed, of Philadelphia, shortly after the appearance of Horne's volume, Wordsworth writes concerning it: "So great is my admiration of Chaucer's genius, and so profound my reverence for him . . . for spreading the light of literature through his native land that, notwithstanding the defects and faults in this publication, I am glad of it as a means of making many acquainted with the original who would otherwise be ignorant of everything about him but his name." In the preface to the little volume Horne had expressed the same conviction, that Chaucer's own language was hopelessly obsolete, and would continue to prove an insuperable bar to his being generally read. But what Wordsworth and his allies failed to see was that, although their versions of Chaucer were done with poetic skill and real reverence for the author's text—and Wordsworth's *Prioress's Tale* is in these respects a model—they could not preserve the essential charm of the original. The last-named version is, in its own way, as touching and beautiful as the original. But there the resemblance ends. And it may even be questioned whether such translations of a great poet into the same language, but after the changes of five centuries, can be trusted to attract readers to the older version. The majority will still remain content with the easier reading. But the true fascination, because the true individuality, of the original has disappeared in the process. The flavour

of any poet is what draws readers to him—and after translation the flavour does not "cling to him still."

But although our later poets may have failed to get Chaucer read by praising him or rewriting him, it does not follow that their own indebtedness to Chaucer has not permanently affected English poetry, and thus reached their readers. Spenser has been called the "Poet's Poet," but Chaucer has almost an equal claim to the title. Although his language has remained unintelligible to the ordinary reader, the poets have managed to read him. Keats and Wordsworth and Tennyson are as truly his disciples as was the author of the *King's Quhair*. Joy in the pure pleasures of the country, in the "glad light green" of an old-fashioned May Day, in the daisy of the field and the song of the birds, is dominant in all that Chaucer wrote. And the joy was so sincere that, though the sentimentalists since have traded on that joy, they have never availed to make it nauseous—outside, at least, of their own ephemeral effusions. It may have remained dormant for long years, when poetry lay under heavy weights of fashion and conventionality, but when our great poets have returned to read and love Chaucer, it has been because Nature has returned, however she had been expelled for a season. As already observed, the poets of our last Renaissance were all Chaucerians—all, I think, except Byron, who pronounced him, "in spite of the praises bestowed

on him," interesting only for his antiquity, and in other respects "contemptible."

Two poets, yet unnamed, who had a large share in bringing back into poetry a first-hand and genuine feeling for country sights and sounds are Cowper and Burns; and it is very unlikely that either of them had ever read a line of Chaucer. Yet both possessed, developed out of their nature and surroundings, eminent Chaucerian qualities. Both had the lightsome touch, and an unmistakable joy in the open air. Both had abundant humour, which found, moreover, material for a caustic satire in the religious degeneracies of their day and country. Cowper's Sir Smug and his West End popular preacher may be classed with Burns's Holy Willie, as not unworthy to rank with Chaucer's Monk and Pardoner, while the *Poor Parson of a Town*, side by side with the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, and Cowper's cottager with her pillow and bobbins, testify to the honour which they all felt for religion when a reality and a blessing. But Burns stands alone among modern poets as of a genius markedly akin to Chaucer's. In his lyric vein he comes, of course, into no kind of comparison with the older poet. For the "lyric cry" was unknown to Chaucer, and he seldom put on "singing robes." And yet in Chaucer's earlier verse there are elements not remote from those which entered into Burns's songs. Such a womanly ideal as is drawn with consummate tenderness in the *Book of the Duchess* is just

such as would have inspired Burns with a score of immortal lyrics. There are even here and there curious parallels of rapturous affection in the two poets. When John of Gaunt, recalling the alternations of hope and fear in his wooing, declares how his

> ownë thoght
> Seyde it were better serve her for noght
> Than with another to be wel;

what is he but anticipating Burns's

> 'Tis sweeter for thee despairing
> Than aught in the world beside, Jessie?

Yet it is not in single felicities but in their robustness of humour and their power of picturesque and animated narrative that the two come into comparison. *Tam o' Shanter* is essentially Chaucerian both in descriptive vigour and in the slyness of the satire. Such a couplet as

> Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither;
> They had been fou for weeks thegither,

is entirely in Chaucer's vein. So is the apostrophe to husbands who will not take their wives' advice, in the lines beginning:

> Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet;

and the matchless spirit of the description when the witches start in pursuit of the unhappy horseman is hardly more full of life than Chaucer's narrative of the waking to activity in the farmyard

when the presence of Reynard is detected, in that masterpiece of drollery, the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. Let us put two passages side by side.

They criden "Out! harrow and weylaway.
Ha, ha, the fox"—and after him they ran
And eek with stavës many another man;
Ran Colle, our dogge, and Talbot and Garlond,
And Malkyn with a distaf in her hand.
Ran cow and calf, and eek the verray hogges,
So were they fered for barking of the dogges,
And shouting of the men and women eke;
They ronnë so hem thoughte her hertë breke,
They yellëden as fiendës doon in helle;
The dokës criden as men wolde hem quelle;
The gees for ferë flowen over the trees,
Out of the hyvë cam the swarm of bees.

And now comes Burns:

As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke,
When plundering herds assail their byke;
As open pussie's mortal foes,
When, pop! she starts before their nose;
As eager runs the market-crowd,
When "Catch the thief!" resounds aloud;
So Maggie runs—the witches follow,
Wi' mony an eldritch skreech and hollow.

Burns has here the advantage of a shorter and brisker metre, but the vitality and realism are of kindred quality. It seems strange that after the conspicuous success of *Tam o' Shanter* when printed in Grose's *Antiquities of Scotland*, Burns never again thought of working this new and unexpected vein of humorous narration. It is

obvious that he, too, might have left us an immortal series of *Canterbury Tales*.

No one else has since contrived to repeat the experiment nor does there seem any likelihood of a new Chaucer arising among us. He remains in quality and diversity of gift unique in our literature. Meantime he also remains unexploited and unvulgarised by fashion, and for this his readers will not fail to be grateful. The gentleman mentioned by R. H. Horne who protested against any modernisation of the poet on the ground that he wished to keep Chaucer for himself and a few friends, showed, perhaps, a literary epicurism of a too cynical sort, but there remains much to be said for the position taken. Chaucer is the gainer by the difficulties (slight though they really are) of mastering his meaning and enjoying his merits. In his own Dantesque allegory, *The House of Fame*, he relates how, in his dream, he saw a "rock of ice," and on it graven the names of many "famous folk," whose names, however, had not been able to resist the action of the sun's rays, and had more or less "thawed off." But on another side of the hill, he came upon a rock on which were inscribed divers other names of famous men as fresh and distinct as if they had been carved on the very day he was privileged to behold them. The poet at first wonders at this different condition of things, and tries to account for it. The reason is not far to seek. The names had been "conserved with the shade."

Chaucer, as he penned these words, little dreamed how applicable to himself his allegory would prove. Chaucer has been "conserved with the shade," and we will earnestly hope that he will never become, like Hamlet, "too much i' the sun."

THE ILLITERATE PEASANT

I

In the exciting presence of an alleged new discovery as to Bacon's authorship of the so-called Shakspearian dramas, one important element in the controversy is likely to be overlooked. The case for the Baconians really rests on the assumption that, whoever else was the author, Shakspeare could not have written them himself, owing to his total lack of the necessary education. Shakspeare, they declare again and again as without fear of contradiction, was the rustic clown who could scarcely spell or write his own name. It may not, therefore, be wholly useless at this juncture to sum up briefly what is fairly certain as to the education available for a burgess's son in Stratford-on-Avon when Shakspeare was a child.

All who care to know are aware that Stratford-on-Avon possessed a grammar school, of Edward the Sixth's foundation, where, as in other like schools throughout the country, the staple subject

taught was Latin grammar, and the Latin authors to which such study opened the door. They know, moreover, that the son of a burgess of that town must have got a free education there or nowhere. It may then be safely assumed that unless William Shakspeare was the veritable Mrs. Harris of literature, and there was "no such person," his father took advantage of such opportunities as his native town presented.

Of what value these opportunities were, the general reader may need to be reminded. As to the curriculum of the ordinary provincial grammar school in Shakspeare's day, there is nothing new to be learned. Some twenty years ago the late Thomas Spencer Baynes, in an article entitled "What Shakspeare learned at School," brought together on the authority of sixteenth and seventeenth century records the fullest and most minute account of the subjects and methods adopted in the successive forms of the grammar school. These were the same, with slight variation, throughout the country. The elementary grammars, dialogue books, and first Readers have long ago passed out of use, but they were chosen with care and discretion. Although the name "grammar" is dominant in the name and objects of the schools, there was no mechanical and wearisome learning of the accidence by rote long before the child was permitted to understand and be interested in a Latin sentence. The invariable method was to begin, from the earliest

moment, with easy colloquial Latin dialogues, the declension of nouns and pronouns and the conjugation of verbs coming rather second than first. By this means the child became aware at the outset of his school life that Latin was a possible alternative language to his own, and not a merely ingenious effort of memory, tested by a complicated system of verbal changes. From this stage the little scholar passed on year by year, and form by form, to more advanced Latin compositions. In the third and fourth forms the boy would read something of the New Testament in Latin, the Eclogues of the mediæval Baptista Mantuanus (the "good old Mantuan" of *Love's Labour's Lost*), the *De Senectute* and *De Amicitia* of Cicero, and the *Tristia* and *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. If the boy remained at school long enough to enter a still higher form he would have to read portions of Horace and Juvenal, Cicero's orations, and the plays of Seneca and Plautus—the former not being reckoned too heavy, nor the latter too light. Such was the substance of the schools' teaching. There is no mention of history, geography, physics, still less of freehand drawing, modern languages, or English literature. But the two first-named subjects would hardly be neglected if the Latin authors were taught by a conscientious and well-instructed teacher. And there is no more reason to suppose Shakspeare's Holofernes to be a true picture of the average grammar-school teacher of the day than to assume Dr.

and Mrs. Blimber fairly to represent the better private schools of the year 1847. Notwithstanding Shakspeare's fondness for caricaturing the pedants of the profession, there is good reason to believe that the schoolmasters of the period were in the main reasonable men who knew their work and felt their responsibilities.

In Shakspeare's day a boy usually entered the grammar school of his native town at the age of seven years. It was required that when he presented himself for admission he should already be able to read and write, and to be otherwise fit to profit by the instruction given. Shakspeare would thus enter the Stratford school in the year 1571, and it is likely that owing to the later decay of his father's fortunes he left school after seven or eight years at most, in order that he might assist in his father's business, or find any other employment that might help to relieve the family difficulties. With these uncertain questions we have, for the moment, no concern. The question before us is—what might be the net result of such a seven years' education as I have indicated on the future development of a boy of exceptional and prodigious natural ability, and aptitude for profiting by opportunity? For it is just these last conditions of making a name in literature that the Baconians prefer to ignore. When they write of Shakspeare as "an illiterate peasant," they find it convenient to dwell almost entirely on his alleged lack of book education,

and on the usual deficiencies of a peasant's home. Yet, unless they boldly deny that any such thing as genius exists, they must admit that the word implies *something*, the germ of which is born with a man, differencing him by its kind, as well as degree, from other men, and finding outlet and scope in the least favourable circumstances. Burns and Keats are by no means the only instances in our literature of genius finding stimulus, nourishment, and the power of growth in the very humblest schools of tuition, and thus coming to impress itself on its generation and all generations that followed. It is surely preposterous, when discussing the probabilities of Shakspeare's authorship, to lay all stress on deficient schooling, and to lay none on the primal gift, tendency, and force. Whoever wrote the Shakspearian dramas was born, beyond all dispute, with an extraordinary and unsurpassed natural capability for becoming at once a poet and a thinker.

So much being granted, the question follows—would this initial force, called genius, be (as the Baconians seem to imply) stultified and extinguished for lack of a long and sustained academic training during the years of boyhood and early manhood? Was the boy Shakspeare's school education, considered as the first stage of culture, inadequate to prepare him for further self-culture later? We know that at the present day the education of a public school, followed by a University, does not always dismiss its possessor into

the world a brilliant or cultured or even a very wise person. Scholastic opportunity is not, therefore, everything, where natural aptitude or capability is wanting. On the other hand, what is the indispensable *minimum* of opportunity where native aptitude and capacity exist in prodigious degree? These are no mere matters of theory or speculation. An intelligent man may answer them out of his own experience of life. The majority of boys who leave a good grammar school at the age of fifteen, and do not proceed to a University, go their way, and taking to business never open a Latin book again, and proceed to forget whatever in Latin literature they ever knew. But there is no lack of exceptions to the rule. A surprisingly scanty amount of seed, as men reckon scantiness, is found at times, like the seed in the parable, to grow into a surprisingly large tree. If there be any foundation for the saying that a poet is "born," it is amazing on what slight food, if it be only of the right quality, the infant thrives. And the intelligent teaching of one dead language, and a few, very few, of its masterpieces, is surely no bad food of the kind.

The principal poetry read in the earlier forms of an Elizabethan grammar school was Ovid, and if a suitable choice was made from that engaging poet, no better stimulus for a young imagination could be found. For the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti* are one long succession of legends and fables told in enchanting verse, and not too much "sicklied

o'er with the pale cast of thought." And thus it had come about that, by the help of Golding's translation of the *Metamorphoses* for those who had no Latin at all, that work had become the most popular and widely diffused of story-books. It was here that the illiterate one would make his first acquaintance with the stories of Daphne and Phaeton, Orpheus and Eurydice, Dis and Proserpina, Baucis and Philemon, Pygmalion and Galatea, and a hundred more. He would meet with the fascinating legend of Pyramus and Thisbe, of which he was afterwards to make such delightful use. And if he was led also along the elegiac paths of the master, he might be struck with the passionate and exceeding bitter cry of Oenone

> Xanthe, retro propera, versaeque recurrite lymphae,
> Sustinet Oenonen deseruisse Paris,

or with the terse dramatic force of the narrative of Lucrece:

> Ut solet a magno fluctus languescere flatu,
> Sed tamen a vento qui fuit, unda tumet.

Side by side with verse so alluring the young peasant would be tasting, for variety of food, the sweet humanities of Cicero on Old Age, and on Friendship, together with the pleasant colloquial humours of Terence. We assume that the boy Shakspeare was taken earlier than usual from school, and that he literally had "no Greek." He may or may not have given promise of ever becoming an exact scholar even in Latin. But

who can question that a native bent towards imaginative themes, an initial curiosity as to man and nature, might find food and stimulus in such a limited reading even as this, if only the teacher gave it the living help of a sympathetic guidance?

So much, then, for the schooldays of the illiterate bumpkin, as imagined by the Baconian. Even Ben Jonson allowed him a modicum of Latin, and, indeed, a half-dozen of fourth-form classics would not seem much to that stalwart and comprehensive scholar. But it is quality, not quantity, that imports most in these cases—and the native soil surely cannot be ignored. In another paper I shall inquire how far the years that followed—though not spent at a University—may have constituted a further education. The Baconians, it is understood, do not deny the possibility of poetic genius being born even in the humblest classes. A certain Scottish plough-boy, and the son of a suburban livery-stable keeper, are not to be ignored on this head. The boasted strength of the Baconian position lies not in denying Shakspeare's alleged inspiration, but in the vast special knowledge displayed in the dramas. The dramatist, they maintain, shows himself an expert, and Shakspeare could not have been one. We must ask leave to examine this contention.

THE ILLITERATE PEASANT

II

If William Shakspeare left the grammar school in 1578 at the age of fourteen, what did he do with himself during the next seven years? Tradition floats airily over the period, and tells how he helped his father in a decaying business; and conjecture adds that he may have found employment for a while in a scrivener's office, where he picked up the well-known technicalities of conveyancing. Meantime he would find leisure to familiarise himself with the flora and fauna of Gloucestershire and Warwickshire: with the former through the practical method of Dotheboys Hall; with the latter by association with companions of the baser sort, who, in Thomas Hood's phrase, "egged him on to poach." He was certainly induced, by what steps we know not, to form an imprudent marriage, at the early age of eighteen and a half, with a lady considerably his elder. Then a daughter was born all too soon, and the *Cito dat* of 1583 was followed in less than two years

by the *Bis dat* of twins early in 1585; and then the bread and cheese question must needs have become urgent. He had written, it may be, verses from time to time; and he had seen the strolling players in Stratford, or the masques at Warwick or Kenilworth, and a desire to act, and a dream of play-writing, had filled his soul. And to London he departs, leaving wife and young family behind him. He finds employment at a theatre, ranging from that of prompter and "super" to tinkerer of bad plays, until he finds friendly eyes to read and approve his verse, and he becomes known as a narrative poet and a sonneteer, and wits and scholars and patrons of rank become aware that he must be reckoned with. In London, too, he lived from the first among poems and plays, and, as time went on, amid the daily discussions of poets, critics, and those who for whatever cause were interested in books and their authors.

All around him were men of genius, though of very diverse gifts—Greene, and Peele, and Marlowe, Kyd and Lyly—pointing out to him the path that he might follow: the beauties he might emulate and the faults he might avoid. Absolutely the best experience that a consummate genius, who was to be the dramatist of the age and all time, could desire, was at his command. Great poetry was all around him, and the drama was in the making, ready to his hand.

All this is education, and all this (again it

must be said) the Baconians prefer to ignore or to disparage. Ignorant as they show themselves, it is still the ignorance of the pedant, which denies to life and its infinite opportunities its vast share in the directing of genius. The school life of Shakspeare—the trials and struggles of his home life—his errors and his sins, his ambitions and his efforts to fulfil them, his mixing in London with all sorts and conditions of men and minds,—all these pass for nothing in the pedant's estimate of education. In this estimate books and studies are everything, whereas for any one capable of being taught it is through the air he breathes (an air, doubtless, vitalised and enriched by books and studies which have combined to form it) that his education comes. It was not till Shakspeare came to trust his own maturing judgment, as it grew under his maturing observation of life, that his transcendent genius threw off the harmful influence of mere books, and of the literary moulds in which other men's genius was cast. It was not until he ceased to imitate other writers that he came to excel other writers. And the first stages of Shakspeare's dramatic art exhibit as clearly as possible the progress of this education. As he began his career as poet by writing narrative and lyrical verse of extraordinary copiousness, his earliest masterpieces in the drama show the same unpruned redundance, and employ rhyme, and the stanza form, and even the sonnet. His first blank verse shows just that lack of variety in the pause

which all his earlier contemporaries exhibit. The practice of word-play and conceits, which wearies the reader to death in John Lyly, finds its counterpart in the verbal repartee of Proteus and Speed. And yet, all the while, Shakspeare's gift of humour makes him quite sensible of the absurdities which the taste of the groundlings, nevertheless, will not allow him quite to abandon. Nearly to the end of his dramatic career he is alternately laughing at and succumbing to the fashionable trickeries of the Euphuist. It is through changes and even inconsistencies such as these that we learn what sort of education was at Shakspeare's command in the school of London life. Unless we belong to the irrational class of literary idolater, or the equally irrational class which denies Shakspeare the authorship, the poet's growing mastery of his craft is traceable from the day he wrote *Love's Labour's Lost* to the day he wrote the *Winter's Tale*. But it was not the education of books. It was the education of an inspired insight and judgment playing ever freely on the daily observation of men and things.

The systematic knowledge of books which the pro-Baconers profess to find in Shakspeare's plays is exactly that which no one else has ever found there. One of the more daring of the brethren has discovered evidence of some twenty Latin and Greek authors (including some of whose works the world had not before heard) with which the poet shows a first-hand acquaintance. But

the intelligent student of the poet has hitherto—and rightly—seen abundant evidence that Shakspeare's knowledge, which is abundant and far-reaching, is just *not* that of the expert, but of the capable man, full of curiosity and interest in all that concerns man and his destiny, walking through the world with eyes and ears and attention, all alert. All the knowledge that the Renaissance had made interesting and fascinating was matter of daily discussion wherever poets, thinkers, scholars, travellers most did congregate. The knowledge which Shakspeare exhibits is for the most part just the knowledge that does not come at first hand, and which cares little for accuracy of detail. He cared no more than Elia for dates. He was, as we have seen, no great scholar, but the legends in Ovid and Virgil were the common property of all men who could read, and were utilised by every weaver of tapestry and inlayer of cabinets. He was no philologist, for he thought with Holofernes and St. Augustine that "abominable" was derived from *ab* and *homo*. He was no geographer, for he thought that Bohemia had a sea-board, or (more probably) did not care whether it had or not. And as is only too probable from certain occasional scratchings of Priscian's head in the concords of verbs with substantives, he was (as Mrs. Squeers said of herself) "no grammarian, thank goodness!"

The believer in cyphers, concealing confessions of authorship and scandals against Queen Eliza-

beth, is past arguing with and past praying for. But there is a class of Shakspeare student, far superior in sanity and intelligence to the former, who deserve a more respectful treatment. It is the class of those who read and use their wits sufficiently to find a stumbling-block in Shakspeare's apparent omniscience, but whose own scholarship has not gone far enough to discover one explanation, at least, of the phenomenon. A single instance in illustration may suffice. A few years since there was a short note in that invaluable miscellany, *Notes and Queries*, to the following effect: the writer modestly disclaims any special knowledge, but confessed that he found coincidences of thought in Shakspeare and Bacon so striking that he was forced to infer that the one borrowed from the other. And the example he cited was this. Both writers, he had noticed, point out that the new-born infant cries on first entering the world, showing thereby how fully he appreciates the situation as a vale of tears. Now the student who notices the coincidence is entitled to all respect. He has read his Bacon and his Shakspeare, and remembers and compares. But though he knows something of value, he does not know quite enough. He does not know that Lucretius made the observation some fifteen centuries before, and that at the time Shakspeare wrote it was current coin as a commonplace of the moralist, the poet, and the preacher.

Here is shown (and one instance is enough)

the too common fallacy of mutual obligation in literature. When an intelligent schoolboy notices a surprising likeness in a Latin and a Greek word meaning the same thing, he asks his teacher whether the Latin was "derived" from the Greek, or *vice versa*. And the teacher, if he knows his business, explains that this is beside the mark. He asks his pupil in return whether he had ever noticed a strong family likeness in two girls, cousins, and whether he had ever wondered which had derived the resemblance in features from the other. The boy, if ingenuous, will admit that he supposes they both derived their facial peculiarities from a common ancestor. And the tutor might then profitably point out that the so-called plagiarisms, and borrowings, and imitations that the world of readers is so keen to detect in two otherwise original geniuses is, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, simply the indebtedness to the common ancestor. And the "common ancestor" in Shakspeare's time was in the air. All the thoughts, speculations, and imaginings that were let loose upon the world through the revival of ancient literature, were common property wherever intellectual curiosity existed. And those who were delighted and sometimes intoxicated by this acquisition of intellectual treasure, loved nothing so much as to make their good fortune known. This, and not the easy solution of "plagiarism," accounts for most of the coincidences between writers that men find perplexing. Then, too,

besides the borrowings from the common storehouse of antiquity, there is the fact of the most varied intelligences playing freely over the same new world of ideas and speculations that the common inheritance had called into activity. "There is among us," says S. T. Coleridge, in his first preface to *Christabel*, "a set of critics who seem to hold that every possible thought and image is traditional; who have no notion that there are such things as fountains in the world, small as well as great; and who would, therefore, charitably derive every rill, they behold flowing, from a perforation made in some other man's tank."

The Illiterate Peasant, starting from a few school-books, was soon launched into the school of life, and later into the school of poets and thinkers. He is the world's miracle, in his union of the gifts of poet and thinker. His genius is a mystery, as all genius is mystery. Yet there is no secret as to the steps by which that genius was guided in its proper mould. He began, as a means of livelihood, to doctor and develop other men's plays, and the end of it was that he "outshone" Kyd and Lyly, and came to give us *Hamlet* in place of the *Spanish Tragedy*, and *Twelfth Night* instead of *Endymion*. It is all very wonderful, but it is idle to deny things because they are wonderful. If we begin to explain away Shakspeare we must go on to explain away Cervantes and Molière and Dickens, Chaucer, Keats, and Burns.

SOME ASPECTS OF MR. STEPHEN PHILLIPS'S NEW TRAGEDY

MORE than one critic of *Paolo and Francesca* has justly pointed out that the concluding lines of the drama have a ring of the seventeenth-century dramatist, Webster, about them. The final verdict upon the unhappy lovers, pronounced by the injured husband and brother as he gazes upon his two newly-slain victims—

> I did not know the dead could have such hair
> Hide them. They look like children fast asleep!

was in all probability suggested by the famous cry of Ferdinand, in *The Duchess of Malfi*, when his eye falls upon his murdered sister:

> Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young.

The desire to conceal the features of the dead, and the comment on the lives cut off in their early prime, are the same in both instances. But though both utterances are at first startling to the reader or spectator, they are not alike open to the same defence. For in the modern tragedy

the words of Giovanni, upon which the curtain falls, would appear to represent a kind of final epitaph on the lovers. In any case, it is the only approach to a moral that the author vouchsafes us. Indeed, from the first scene of the play to the last, it is impossible to define the poet's own judgment of the crime that brings about so terrible a retribution. At one moment he seems desirous to emphasise the action of Paolo as being specially ungrateful, unnatural, and treacherous. At another, he dwells upon the youthfulness of the pair as something of an excuse. At another, again, he would appear to regard them as entangled by Destiny in a certain web from which it were idle to expect them to extricate themselves. And the strange plea is more than once advanced in their behalf that the lovers wooed, and were wooed, respectively, "against their will," though the development of the story, as worked out by the dramatist, by no means supports this pretension. The lady, more especially, never from the first offers any appreciable resistance to the course that events are taking.

It is this undetermined attitude of the dramatist that more than anything else makes his treatment of the theme unsatisfying. With whom lies the chief responsibility for the guilt of the lovers—if guilt it be—is left unsettled. The great poet who first treated the subject was able to throw no light on it in this direction, save in so far that he recognised eternal punishment as its righteous

doom. Dante had no room for detail in his consummate and world-famous episode. He does not add a word that could lead the reader to take a side in the matter. The deformity and savage temper of the husband, and the deceit practised on the unhappy maiden by her father, in allowing her to believe that it was Paolo to whom she was betrothed, are alike ignored. The simple outlines of the story—an ill-assorted match, love, temptation, retribution—are indicated; and in the space of some fifty lines no more could have been told. But when Dante's version was chosen for expansion into either narrative verse or drama, this policy of reticence became no longer possible. Leigh Hunt recognised this when he wrote his *Story of Rimini*. He felt that some palliation must be provided for the infidelity of the lady, and he found it in the treachery of her own father. Indeed, that there should be no mistake in the matter, he boldly labelled his poem, *The Story of Rimini; or, Fruits of a Parent's Falsehood*. He might have borrowed Wordsworth's heading to a well-known lyric and called it *A Lesson to Fathers*. Mr. Phillips wholly ignores the incident of deception on the parent's side; nor does he submit any other definite excuse for the lovers. As to whether pity or blame is to be predominant in the reader's judgment of their offence, no guidance is even suggested by the dramatist. The reader purchases the volume and takes his choice. He must draw his own moral.

But, as I have said, for taking this course Mr. Phillips cannot claim the authority of his great original. Dante's method does not, indeed, admit of his passing his own comments on the guilt of the lovers, but at least they are represented as performing an eternal expiation. In his method there is, indeed, no playing with sin, no minimising its eternal significance. But a poet, borrowing the subject for dramatic purposes, cannot have recourse to the theological aspect of the situation. Mr. Phillips does, indeed, introduce one, and only one, allusion to the source and inspiration of his play. In a remarkable passage towards the close of the fourth act, he makes the lovers anticipate the destiny which Dante was afterwards to pronounce for them. "Ah, Paolo!" exclaims Francesca,

> if we
> Should die to-night, then whither would our souls
> Repair? There is a region which priests tell of
> Where such as we are punished without end.

The lady, being the weaker vessel, shows some concern at the prospect, but her lover retorts by welcoming so blest a fate, defying the Almighty to do His worst. If only the lovers are allowed to remain together, he declares, even hell will be a heaven:

> Us, then, whose only pain can be to part,
> How wilt Thou punish? For what ecstasy
> Together to be blown about the globe!
> What rapture in perpetual fire to burn
> Together!—where we are is endless fire.

> There centuries shall in a moment pass,
> And all the cycles in one hour elapse!
> How wilt Thou punish us who cannot part?

Probably Mr. Phillips held this oblique recognition of the poet from whom he borrows as that poet's due, but its effect—as suggesting that the characters have no existence independent of Dante—is singularly undramatic.

The drama has been welcomed by the critics with a rare unanimity of applause, one reviewer alone—so far as I have noticed—having demurred to the general verdict. With some of the praise thus liberally bestowed, it is pleasant to be able to agree. Mr. Phillips has evidently a shrewd sense of what will be effective on the stage. He understands construction, and the value of situations and of climax, and—greatest rarity of all—he errs on the side of brevity rather than of diffuseness. The story is worked out without unnecessary circumlocution, and there is not much of the dialogue that could be spared. Save for the unfortunate digression into the theological speculations of the "Inferno," there does not seem much work for the pruning-knife of the stage-manager to do. Yet this very circumstance seems to point to the radical defect of the drama. It is too brief for the adequate development of the serious human interests involved; it is rather the skeleton of a tragedy than a tragedy. It wants clothing, or elaborating, with something that the author does not provide. It lacks some-

thing that a Shakspeare, or even a Webster, gives us in his drama. What is this?

As it may be considered unfair to force a young and unpractised playwright into comparison with Shakspeare, we will take that other dramatist, with an apparent suggestion of whom Mr. Phillips's drama ends. *The Duchess of Malfi* is a fine, but in many ways a repulsive, play. Webster's defects, or rather excesses, are admitted by all his readers. He is the most eminent of that school of dramatists who write what has been styled the "tragedy of blood." It abounds in slaughter and in suffering, and the poet has no scruples as to the former being perpetrated *coram populo*. It is grim, ghastly, *bizarre*, all but grotesque in its incidents. It is often cynically plain-spoken and even coarse in its language, contrasting painfully with the divine reticence of Shakspeare. And yet no reader, when he arrives at the end, can be insensible to the fact that he has lived all through it in high and elevating companionship, both of noble characters and noble thoughts and ideas. He has been pained and terrified, but he has been lifted above vulgar things by the pity and terror he has suffered. Not alone in such lines as:

> I have ever thought
> Nature doth nothing so great for great men
> As when she's pleased to make them lords of truth:

but in the poet's clear conception of the characters of the Duchess and of her chosen husband,

there is a store-house of human dignity and virtue, which would sweeten even a more unsavoury atmosphere than that in which Webster has set them. The speech of the Duchess in the opening scene, when she declares her love for Antonio, beginning,

> The misery of us that are born great.
> We are forced to woo, because none dare woo us,

strikes a keynote to the tragedy which no after sounds of discord or extravagance can ever drown. Now, that which offends us in Webster is not found in Mr. Phillips's method. The bulk of his verse is elegant and lyrical rather than dramatic. He does not shock his reader by the extravagant or the grotesque, and there is no bloodshed save in the inevitable death of the lovers. "All is serene and placid in his art." There is no recourse to the mingled atrocity and impurity with which too many of the Elizabethan dramatists were wont to treat subjects from mediæval Italy. Where Mr. Phillips is sweet and tender, it is with the Tennysonian sweetness of such a passage as the alternate reading of the Lancelot and Guinevere legend at the close of the third act, which might, indeed, well be a transcript from the *Idylls*:

> Now they two were alone, yet could not speak;
> But heard the beating of each other's hearts.
> He knew himself a traitor but to stay,
> Yet could not stir: she pale, and yet more pale
> Grew till she could no more, but smiled on him.

> Then, when he saw that wishèd smile, he came
> Near to her, and still near, and trembled; then
> Her lips all trembling kissed.

Nor is Mr. Phillips ever gross, as in certain passages Webster undoubtedly is, though it must be noticed that in the lighter parts of the play the jests of the soldiers are needlessly suggestive. Moreover, there is one character introduced which is surely a mistake—that of a frank young lady in attendance on Francesca, who, by way of meeting some scruples on the part of her mistress replies that she herself is "ever gay, and this is a gay world"; and as if to assure her hearer that the word "gay" is the same as when predicated of the late Lord Quex, adds:

> if we girls are prudent but a little,
> 'Tis easy to enjoy.

The character and the part she plays, though slight, are a distinct blot upon the general purity of the play, unless, indeed, Mr. Phillips intended that such counsellors as these had any influence upon the final surrender of Francesca. Nor is this the only grave mistake, as it seems to me, in the conduct of the story. If the theory is tenable that the lovers were from the first hurried to their doom by an irresistible Fate, the dramatist should hardly have represented Paolo, at the most critical moment in his destiny, as seriously deliberating whether, in order to avoid the overmastering temptation that lay before him, he

should go forth with his brother soldiers and die on the battlefield, or return to the scene of his temptation and there take poison. Can Mr. Phillips himself have refrained from a smile when he represented his hero adopting the latter course on the ground that it would be more disagreeable to Francesca, after his decease, to think of his body as marred and gashed. If so, it is hard to suppose that the dramatist is not somewhat lacking in the sense of humour.

To return from this digression, there remains to notice what must be regarded as one salient difference between the poetic drama as handled by Mr. Phillips, and that of Shakspeare and the majority of his illustrious contemporaries.

What we recall in the dramas of a Shakspeare or a Webster is that, although, from the nature of the case, the poet nowhere speaks in his own person, each play is illustrated along its course by a running commentary on human life and conduct —this commentary consisting mainly of great and suggestive thoughts expressed, with perfect dramatic appropriateness, by those of the characters for whom the sympathy of the spectator is enlisted. We have only to recall the scores of familiar quotations that have passed from these dramas into the current morals and philosophy of every day to be convinced of this. Nor is this all. It is, of course, permissible, when some sentiment is quoted as Shakspeare's, to submit that this is fallacious, because the sentiment is placed

in the mouth of a Hamlet or a Jaques, a Portia or an Imogen—that it is merely dramatic; and, as such, cannot safely be taken as expressing the mind of the dramatist himself. But this is only a half-truth. Irrespective of the moral or philosophical axioms or reflections uttered by any one of Shakspeare's characters, there is an unmistakable ethical flavour, purifying and elevating the general atmosphere, in almost every one of Shakspeare's dramas. The poet's treatment of his theme leaves a sweet taste in the reader's mouth, a tender and enduring echo in his ear, when he has finished its perusal. When we call to mind *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Cymbeline*, not to mention the three greatest tragedies, we recall irresistibly an ethical beauty and animus pervading the whole, distinct from any detached and striking sayings of individual characters; though, doubtless, all such combine to produce the final result. And this, even where the plot of the drama, a *Cymbeline* or a *Measure for Measure*, is grotesque and even repelling. And no one who thinks of the hundreds of passages from such plays that have passed into our everyday morality and philosophy, can doubt that this presence of ethical beauty has done more even than his transcendent greatness in other kinds to place Shakspeare where he stands, immovable, in the affections of his countrymen.

All this may sound like a commonplace of criticism, and indeed it is. But it seems to me

that it is the singular absence from Mr. Phillips's tragedy of what may be called the ethical element that accounts, more than the actual incompleteness of the working out, for an effect of thinness and disappointment in the treatment of his theme. The play, so far as I have searched it, does not contain from end to end a single abstract thought or sentiment. No one character in it utters a single comment or reflection upon human life or character—their tendencies and their issues. And in consequence of this there is no sentence, phrase, or single line in the play that could by any possibility be separated from its context, and be made welcome as an addition to our stock of moral ideas in daily life. Once more, I am not forgetting that it is idle and worse to complain of any dramatist, ancient or modern, that he does not rank with the greatest name in literature, but that does not bar a critic from comparing the methods of two dramatists, however widely separated in excellence. And this difference of method is, I am sure, in Mr. Phillips's case, not an accident, but the result of a deliberate intention. One of Mr. Phillips's critics has suggested that he apparently sought to blend the romantic touch of the Elizabethans with something of "Greek severity." But in the dramas of the Greek tragedians, even Greek severity is found to admit of an abundant commentary on life and frequent reflections on conduct. Mr. Phillips's notion of a tragedy dispenses wholly with a chorus, and the

lack is not supplied by any ethical element whatever in the dialogue.

The play does leave the impression of being "severely bare" of something, and it is surely in the direction just noticed. As regards the conduct of his two principal characters, as regards the proportion of guilt to calamity, of overmastering Fate to personal responsibility, Mr. Phillips says no word, nor allows a word to be said, that might disclose his own thoughts. Nor, scattered through his often musical and eloquent dialogue, are there any such comments as abound in Shakspeare, sweetening and elevating the situation. When we turn again and again to his great tragedies and comedies we are struck and moved afresh by the ever-living thoughts that confront us:

> Spirits are not finely touch'd
> But to fine issues.
>
> The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us.
>
> How far that little candle throws his beams!
> So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

In the continual occurrence of such thoughts consists the undying charm of the Shakspearian drama for the vast majority of readers who will never understand what is meant by "Art for art's sake." The occurrence in *Paolo and Francesca* of a single parenthesis such as, "One who loved not wisely but too well," or, "A man more sinned against than sinning," would have at once lifted

the catastrophe to a level of the true pathetic, which at present, in my judgment, it never attains. The play seems always aiming at the pathetic, and never reaching it; and the lack of the ethical touch must surely be the reason for the failure. Nor, notwithstanding the deep human misery with which it deals, is it ever poignant. There is no such moment in the whole play, where the reader is struck dumb with pity, as in Dante's

> Se fosse amico il Re dell' universo,
> Noi pregheremmo lui per la tua pace;

for the very soul of pathos is in Dante, just because he never stands aloof from the moral aspect of suffering — because he is never a disinterested spectator of human frailty.

In the concluding lines of Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, Antonio's friend, Delio, when almost all the actors in that ghastly tragedy have passed from the scene, says:

> Let us make noble use of this great ruin.

Now this is what Mr. Phillips does not achieve. Of the "great ruin" of two young lives, and of others bound up with theirs, Mr. Phillips makes poetic and dramatic use, but not such use as Delio meant by "noble." The noblest use of all seems mainly wanting. The characters in the play seem to move in a vacuum, the missing atmosphere being that of the poet's controlling sympathies. We turn to the dramatist for some clue to these sympathies

and find none. The nearest approach to the true pathetic is where, at last, pity is shown as breaking down a long-raised barrier of bitter personal chagrin, where Lucrezia is once more made human by her new-born love for Francesca. The incident shows that Mr. Phillips need not hesitate to allow fullest play to his own humanity, should he again essay a tragedy of love and guilt. If the present drama should attain success on the stage, it will be, I venture to predict, by virtue of this character of Lucrezia in the hands of a competent actress. But I still think that after the ordinary reader has fixed the plot and situations of the story in his memory, he will not find himself turning again and again to its pages to refresh himself with the stimulus of its "criticism of Life," or the solace of its moral beauty.

MR. DICKENS'S AMATEUR THEATRICALS

A REMINISCENCE

IT is now some eighteen years[1] since the present writer—then in his schooldays—took part in the earliest of those winter-evening festivities at the house of the late Charles Dickens, which continued annually for several years, terminating with the performance of Mr. Wilkie Collins's drama of *The Frozen Deep*. And when he remembers the number of notable men who either shared in or assisted (in the French sense) at those dramatic revels, who have passed away in the interval, he is filled with a desire to preserve some recollections of evenings so memorable. *Private* theatricals in one sense they were; but the size and the character of the audiences which they brought together placed them in a different category from the entertainments which commonly bear that name; and to preserve one's recollections of those days is scarcely to intrude upon the domain of

[1] [Written in 1870.]

private life. The greatest of that band has lately passed away, and before him many others of "these, our actors"; and though some remain to this day, the events of those years have, even to those who shared in them, passed into the region of history.

"What nights have we seen at the Mermaid!" What evenings were those at Tavistock House, when the best wit and fancy and culture of the day met within its hospitable walls! There was Thackeray, towering in bodily form above the crowd, even as he towered in genius above them all, save only one; Jerrold, with the blue convex eye, which seemed to pierce into the very heart of things and trace their subtle resemblances; Leech, with his frank and manly beauty, fresh from the portrayal of "Master Jacky," or some other of the many forms of boyhood he knew so well; Mark Lemon, "the frolic and the gentle" (dear to all us younger ones, irrespective of blood-relationship, as "Uncle Mark"); Albert Smith, dropping in late in the evening after a two or three thousandth ascent of Mont Blanc, but never refusing at our earnest entreaty to sit down to the piano and sing us "My Lord Tomnoddy" or his own latest edition of "Galignani's Messenger"; Augustus Egg, with his dry humour, touching from contrast with the face of suffering that gave sad presage of his early death; Frank Stone, the kindly neighbour and friend, keen as any of us boys for his part in the afterpiece; Stanfield, with the beaming face, "a

largess universal like the sun," his practised hand and brush prompt to gladden us with masterpieces of scene-painting for the Lighthouse or the Ice-fields; and last—but not here to be dismissed with a few lines only,—our bountiful host, like Triplet, "author, manager, and actor too"; organiser, deviser, and harmoniser of all the incongruous assembled elements; the friend whom we have so lately lost—the incomparable Dickens. The very walls of that home, and the furniture which filled it, were rich in interest and eloquent of his fame and the tribute which it had brought him: the testimonial given him at Birmingham; the handsome case of cutlery sent him by Mr. Brooks of Sheffield (recognisant of the chance mention of his name in the pages of *Copperfield*); Grip, the raven, in his habit as he lived, under the glass case in the hall; the Chinese gong, then less common in English houses than now, reminding the reader familiar with his "Dickens," of that one at Dr. Blimber's which the weak-eyed young man, to Paul's amazement, suddenly let fly at "as if he had gone mad or wanted vengeance"; the pictures which looked down upon us from the walls of dining-room and staircase, Sir Charles Coldstream in his ploughboy's disguise, or Bobadil prostrate on the couch; the lady in the barouche reading the current number of *Bleak House*, and the curious tiger skimming the contents over her shoulder; Dolly Varden in the wood; poor Kate Nickleby at work in Madame Mantalini's showroom; little

Nell among the tombs of that old church which in these days of restoration will soon have no existence but on the canvas of George Cattermole—these, and many more such signs of the atmosphere of art and literature in which we moved, were gathered then—and are now scattered to the four winds.

In one sense our theatricals began and ended in the schoolroom. To the last that apartment served us for stage and auditorium and all. But in another sense we got promotion from the children's domain by degrees. Our earliest efforts were confined to the children of the family and their equals in age, though always aided and abetted by the good-natured manager, who improvised costumes, painted and corked our innocent cheeks, and suggested all the most effective business of the scene. Our first attempt was the performance of Albert Smith's little burletta of *Guy Fawkes*, which appeared originally in the pages of his monthly periodical, the *Man in the Moon*; at another time we played "William Tell," from the late Mr. Robert Brough's clever little volume, *A Cracker Bon-bon for Evening Parties*. In those days there were still extravaganzas written with real humour and abundant taste and fancy. The Broughs, Gilbert à Beckett, and Mr. Planché could write rhymed couplets of great literary excellence, without ever overstepping the bounds of reverence and good taste. Extreme purists may regret that the story of the struggle

for Swiss independence should ever be presented to children in association with anything ludicrous; but, those critics excepted, no other could object to the spirit of "gracious fooling" in which Mr. Brough represented William Tell brought up before Gesler for "contempt of hat"; Albert, his precocious son, resolving that, as to betraying his father, "though torn in half, I'll not be made to split"; and when he comforts his father, about to shoot at the apple, by assuring him that he is "game," the father replying, "Wert thou *game*, I would preserve, not shoot thee." This is drollery, it seems to us, not unworthy of Sydney Smith or Hood, and in no way to be placed in the same catalogue with the vulgarities and inanities of a later brood.

Another year found us more ambitious, and with stronger resources, for Mr. Dickens himself and Mr. Mark Lemon joined our acting staff, though, with kindly consideration for their young brethren, they chose subordinate parts. In Mr. Planché's elegant and most witty fairy extravaganza of *Fortunio and his Seven Gifted Servants*, Mr. Dickens took the part of the old Baron Dunover, whose daughters so valiantly adopt man's attire and go to the wars; Mr. Lemon contented himself with the *rôle* of the Dragon, who is overcome by Fortunio's stratagem of adulterating the well, whither he usually resorted to quench his thirst, with a potent admixture of sherry. What fun it was, both on and off the

stage! The gorgeous dresses from the eminent costumier of the Theatres Royal; our heads bewigged and our cheeks rouged by the hands of Mr. Clarkson himself; the properties from the Adelphi; the unflagging humour and suggestive resources of our manager, who took upon him the charge of everything, from the writing of the playbills to the composition of the punch, brewed for our refreshment between the acts, but "craftily qualified," as Michael Cassio would have said, to suit the capacities of the childish brain, for Dickens never forgot the *maxima reverentia* due to children, and some of us were of *very* tender age; the comedian who played (in a complete jockey's suit and top-boots) Fortunio's servant Lightfoot, was —we are afraid to say *how* young—but it was somewhere between two and three, and he was announced in the bill as having been "kept out of bed at a vast expense." The same veracious document, by the way, represented the sole lessee and manager of the Theatre Royal, Tavistock House, as Mr. Vincent Crummles, disguising Mr. Dickens himself in the list of *dramatis personæ* as the "Modern Roscius," and Mark Lemon as the "Infant Phenomenon,"—an exquisitely conceived surprise for the audience, who by no means expected from the description to recognise in the character the portly form of the editor of *Punch*. The time, by the way, must have been the winter preceding the commencement of hostilities with Russia, for Mr. Dickens took advantage of there

being a ferocious despot in the play—the Emperor Matapa—to identify him with the Czar in a capital song (would we could recall it!) to the tune of "The Cork Leg," in which the Emperor described himself as "the Robinson Crusoe of absolute state," and declared though he had at his Court "many a show-day, and many a high-day," he hadn't in all his dominions "a Friday!" Mr. Planché had in one portion of the extravaganza put into the mouth of this character for the moment a few lines of burlesque upon Macbeth, and we remember Mr. Dickens's unsuccessful attempts to teach the performer how to imitate Macready, whom he (the performer) had never seen! And after the performance, when we were restored to our evening-party costumes, and the schoolroom was cleared for dancing, still a stray "property" or two had escaped the vigilant eye of the property-man; for Douglas Jerrold had picked up the horse's head (Fortunio's faithful steed "Comrade"), and was holding it up before the greatest living animal painter, who had been one of the audience, with "Looks as if it knew *you*, Edwin!"

Another time we attempted Fielding's *Tom Thumb*, using O'Hara's altered version, further abridged and added to by the untiring master of our ceremonies. Fielding's admirable piece of mock-heroic had always been a favourite of Charles Dickens. It has often been noticed how rarely he quotes in his books, but the reader of

Pickwick will remember how in an early chapter of that immortal work Mr. Alfred Jingle sings the two lines :—

> In hurry, post-haste, for a licence,
> In hurry, ding-dong, I come back.

They are from Lord Grizzle's song in *Tom Thumb*. Mr. Lemon played the giantess Glumdalca, in an amazing get-up of a complete suit of armour and a coal-scuttle bonnet ; and Mr. Dickens the small part of the ghost of Gaffer Thumb, singing his own song, on the occasion, a verse of which may be quoted, if only to illustrate the contrast between the styles of the earlier and later burlesque. In O'Hara's version the ghost appears to King Arthur, singing :—

> Pale death is prowling,
> Dire omens scowling
> Doom thee to slaughter,
> Thee, thy wife and daughter ;
> Furies are growling
> With horrid groans.
> Grizzle's rebellion
> What need I tell you on ?
> Or by a red cow
> Tom Thumb devour'd ?
> Hark, the cock crowing, [*Cock crows.*
> I must be going.
> I can no more ! [*Vanishes.*

Mr. Dickens's substituted lines were, as nearly as we remember, the following :—

I've got up from my churchyard bed,
And assumed the perpendicular,
Having something to say in my head,
Which isn't so very particular!
I do not appear in sport,
But in earnest, all danger scorning—
I'm in your service, in short,
And I hereby give you warning— [*Cock crows.*

Who's dat crowing at the door?
Dere's some one in the house with Dinah!
I'm call'd (so can't say any more)
By a voice from Cochin China!

Nonsense, it may be said, all this; but the nonsense of a great genius has always something of genius in it.

The production next year, on the same stage, of the drama of *The Lighthouse*, marked a great step in the rank of our performances. The play was a touching and tragic story, founded (if we are not mistaken) upon a tale by the same author, Mr. Wilkie Collins, which appeared in an early number of his friend's weekly journal, *Household Words*. The principal characters were sustained by Mr. Dickens, Mr. Mark Lemon, Mr. Wilkie Collins, and the ladies of Mr. Dickens's family. The scenery was painted by Clarkson Stanfield, and comprised a drop-scene representing the exterior of Eddystone Lighthouse, and a room in the interior in which the whole action of the drama was carried on. The prologue was written (we believe) by Mr. Dickens, and we can recall as if it were yesterday the impressive elocution of

Mr. John Forster, as he spoke behind the scenes the lines which follow :—

> A story of those rocks where doomed ships come
> To cast their wrecks upon the steps of home :
> Where solitary men, the long year through,
> The wind their music, and the brine their view
> Teach mariners to shun the fatal light,—
> A story of those rocks is here to-night :
> Eddystone Lighthouse.

(Here the green curtain rose and discovered Stanfield's drop-scene, the Lighthouse, its lantern illuminated by a transparency)—

> in its ancient form,
> Ere he who built it died in the great storm
> Which shivered it to nothing—once again
> Behold out-gleaming on the angry main.
> Within it are three men,—to these repair
> In our swift bark of fancy, light as air ;
> They are but shadows, we shall have you back
> Too soon to the old dusty, beaten track.

We quote from memory, and here our memory fails. We are not aware that the prologue was ever published, or indeed the play for which it was written ; though *The Lighthouse* was performed two or three years later at the Olympic, with Mr. Robson in the character originally played by Mr. Dickens. The little drama was well worthy of publication, though by conception and treatment alike it was fitted rather for amateurs, and a drawing-room, than for the public stage. The main incident of the plot—the confession of a

murder by the old sailor, Aaron Gurnock, under pressure of impending death from starvation (no provisions being able to reach the lighthouse, owing to a continuance of bad weather), and his subsequent retraction of the confession when supplies unexpectedly arrive—afforded Mr. Dickens scope for a piece of acting of great power. To say that his acting was amateurish is to depreciate it in the view of a professional actor, but it is not necessarily to disparage it. No one who heard the public readings from his own book which Mr. Dickens subsequently gave with so much success, needs to be told what rare natural qualifications for the task he possessed. Fine features and a striking presence, with a voice of great flexibility, were added to a perfect mastery over the sense of his author, because that author was himself. But it is certain that many a low comedian would have made the character of Sam Weller, for instance, more telling than it proved in the hands of its originator. Many persons will remember what a hush of expectation used to take possession of the entire audience, when in the trial-scene from *Pickwick*, the crier of the court said, "Call Samuel Weller," and that immortal worthy stepped into the box; and what a palpable feeling of disappointment succeeded his first words as spoken by Mr. Dickens! Whether it was that the average reader of *Pickwick* expected to find the peculiar flow of humour associated with the character to be accompanied by some equally

marked peculiarities of tone and manner, or that every person present had formed a different conception of the hero, and was therefore inevitably doomed to disappointment; certain it is that nearly every one of the audience thought that the reader had in this respect unaccountably failed; and, as we have said, many a low comedian without a tithe of Mr. Dickens's genius or knowledge of human nature would have better satisfied the general expectation. But we are persuaded, and were persuaded at the time, that Mr. Dickens exhibited a fidelity to truth in this instance more really artistic than in his imitations of certain familiar types of character such as Serjeant Buzfuz or Mrs. Cluppins. He presented Samuel Weller as having, in spite of all his wit and readiness, the characteristics of the class of society to which he belonged. People had forgotten that Sam Weller was a boots and a waiter, and that, although a master of chaff and slang, he was not a professional clown; and they expected to hear from the artist and the literary man what they would have heard in a dramatised version from the low-comedy actor. In this respect Mr. Dickens, as an actor, was amateurish; but it is only another way of saying that he was not of the stage, stagey. If there was a certain ease and *handiness* which the practice of the art as a profession might have brought to him, he at least escaped the tyranny of those conventionalisms which the best actors (at least of our own time) have not been able to

resist. Mr. Dickens's acting—certainly his *serious* acting—might have failed in a large theatre, just as a picture painted by Creswick or Cooke would have been ineffective if used as a scene in that theatre. In both cases, broader effects and less carefulness in details would have been needed to produce the desired effect.

The farce of *Mr. Nightingale's Diary*, the joint production of Dickens and Mark Lemon, which followed Mr. Collins's play at Tavistock House, was well calculated to exhibit the versatility of the principal actor. Mr. Dickens played one Mr. Gabblewig, in which character he assumed four or five different disguises, changing his dress, voice, and look with a rapidity and completeness which the most practised "entertainer" might envy. This whimsical piece of extravagance had been before played by the same actors in the performances for the benefit of the Guild of Literature and Art, but has never been printed, except privately for the use of the original actors. What portions were contributed by the authors respectively we can only surmise ; but there were certain characters and speeches which bore very clearly stamped upon them the mark of their authorship. One of the characters played by Mr. Dickens was an old lady, in great trouble and perplexity about a missing child ; of which character (being nameless in the drama) he always spoke, when he had occasion to refer to her off the stage, as Mrs. Gamp, some of whose speeches were as well worthy

of preservation for droll extravagance of incongruity as the best of her famous prototype in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. In addition to her perplexity about the missing infant, she is further embarrassed as to the exact surname of Mr. Nightingale, whose name she remembers to be that of a bird, but cannot always refer to the correct species of that order. A quotation we make from memory will leave no doubt as to the fertile and singular fancy from whose mint it came:—

"No, sir, I will not leave the house! I will not leave the establishment without my child, my boy. *My* boy, sir, which he were his mother's hope and his father's pride, and no one as I am aweer on's joy. Vich the name as was giv' to this blessedest of infants and vorked in best Vitechapel mixed upon a pincushin, and 'Save the mother' likewise, were Abjalom, after his own parential father, Mr. Nightingale, who no other ways than by being guv' to liquor, lost a day's vork at the veelwright business, vich it was but limited, Mr. Skylark, being veels of donkey-chaises and goats; and vun vas even drawn by geese for a wager, and came up the aisle o' the parish church one Sunday afternoon by reason of the perwerseness of the animals, as could be testified by Mr. Wix the beadle afore he died of drawing on Vellinton boots to which he was not accustomed, after an 'carty meal of roast beef and a pickled walnut to which he were too parjial! Yes, Mr. Robin Redbreast, in the marble fontin of that theer church

was he baptized Abjalom, vich never can be unmade or undone, I am proud to say, not to please nor give offence to no one, nohows and noveres, sir. . . . Ah! 'affliction sore long time Maria Nightingale bore; physicians *was* in vain'—not that I am aweer she had any one in particular, sir, excepting *one*, vich she tore his hair by handfuls out in consequence of disagreements re*la*tive to her complaint; and dead she is, and will be, as the hosts of the Egyptian fairies; and this I shall prove, directly minute, on the evingdence of my brother the sexton, whom I shall here produce, to your confusion, young person, in the twinkling of a star or humin eye!"

Scarcely had the old lady quitted the stage when Mr. Dickens reappeared as "my brother the sexton," a very old gentleman indeed, with a quavery voice and self-satisfied smile (pleasantly suggesting how inimitable must have been the same actor's manner as Justice Shallow), and afflicted with a "hardness of hearing" which almost baffled the efforts of his interrogators to obtain from him the desired information as to the certificate of Mrs. Nightingale's decease. "It's no use your whispering to me, sir!" was the gentle remonstrance which the first loud shout in his ear elicited; and on the question being put whether "he had ever buried"—he at once interrupted to reply that he *had brewed*; and that he and his old woman—"my old woman was a Kentish woman, gentlemen; one year, sir, we

brewed some of the strongest ale that ever you drank, sir; they used to call it down in our part of the country (in allusion, you understand, to its great strength, gentlemen), 'Samson with his hair on,'"—at which point the thread of his narrative was cut short by the reiteration, in a louder key still, of the intended question in a complete form. A third character in the farce, sustained by Dickens, was that of a *malade imaginaire*, for the time being under treatment by a new specific, "mustard and milk," the merits of which he could not highly enough extol, but which nevertheless was not so soothing in its effects but that the patient gave every minute a loud shriek—explaining apologetically, "That's the mustard!" followed immediately by a still louder one, "That's the milk!" We are afraid to say in how many other disguises our manager appeared, but there was certainly one other, a footman or waiter, in which character the actor gave us a most amusing caricature of the manner of one of his own servants; and we remember with what glee, one night at supper after rehearsal, Dickens learned that the man in question had been heard imitating his master in the part for the amusement of his fellow-servants, in utter ignorance that he himself had sat in the first instance for the portrait. This very clever farce might well be given to the public now that the chief actor is no more; for though the character is wholly beyond the reach of most amateurs, or even most professionals (and

we are not forgetting Mr. Charles Mathews in *Patter* versus *Clatter*), the piece contains dialogue full of humour peculiarly Dickensian. As a comedian, it is perhaps with Charles Mathews alone that we should think of comparing Charles Dickens. In repose, the walk and voice and manner of the two were much alike; though in power of facial and vocal change Mr. Dickens had great advantages; and he had further an *earnestness* quite beyond the reach of the other actor, the lack of which has kept him from excelling in many characters for which in other respects he would seem to be peculiarly qualified. The same amazing fertility and rapidity of invention, in which Dickens stands without a rival as a humourist, often served him in excellent stead, in the sudden substitution of extempore remarks known to the professional actor as "gag." On one occasion in a farce (we forget its name) played after *The Frozen Deep*, one of the characters having occasion to disguise himself for the moment in the chintz-cover of the sofa, Mr. Dickens suddenly observed, to the astonishment of his fellow-actors, "He has a general appearance of going to have his hair cut!" a comparison so ingeniously perfect as to convulse everybody on and off the stage with laughter. In this rapid discovery of resemblances —for example, Mrs. Lirriper's description of the poor gentleman, when the fire broke out in her lodgings, carried out in a chair, "similar to Guy Fawkes," or the description of Captain Bunsby's

eyes, "one moveable and one stationary, on the principle of some lighthouses"—our great novelist has never been approached. "Thus," it has been truly said, "he makes human nature and its surroundings speak to us; and thus the richness of life is multiplied to us infinitely, so long as we are enabled to view it with his eyes." This predominant note of Charles Dickens's humour, in which he has had and continues to have endless imitators but no equal, adds another to the many difficulties that are found in drawing any sharp line of distinction between humour and wit. Wit, according to the definition commonly accepted, lies in the discovery of relations between words or ideas before unsuspected or unimagined; but the genius of at least one eminent contemporary of Dickens shows how any definition of the kind is subject to continuous modification. Thomas Hood was a great wit—in his own line without a rival—but his best wit merges into humour, transfused by his great gift of human kindness. Thackeray was feeling his way to a truer account of the matter when he said, "Shall we not call humour the union of love and wit?" In this combination of a swift and vivid intellectual apprehension with the controlling sense of a human relationship with all the diverse creations of his fancy, consists the power of Charles Dickens. And in this regard, as a humourist, he takes higher rank than Thackeray. The latter does not stand on the same level as his characters: he looks down upon them, kindly, no

doubt, and pityingly, but still from a higher elevation. The allegory which he suggested in the preface to *Vanity Fair* was more candid than perhaps the writer knew. He looked on the men and women whose thoughts and actions developed under his hand as puppets, and he thereby missed the sense, ever present with his brother-novelist, of a real human equality with them. He was capable of love for them, but it was the love of compassion rather than of sympathy.

It was perhaps partly owing to Mr. Dickens's sense that his mission in life was to be an "entertainer," that from the outset of his literary career he exhibited so strong a fellow-feeling with entertainers of all kinds; and these few rough notes of his own theatrical relaxations may be of interest if only as illustrating one undoubted characteristic of his genius. His love of the stage, and his familiarity with every aspect of it, are apparent in almost everything he has written, from the *Sketches by Boz*, in which he described an evening at Astley's (which, by the way, may be compared, by those who like to trace the growing power and the perfecting touch of a great artist, with a description of the same scene in the *Old Curiosity Shop*), to the casual mention in the unfinished *Mystery of Edwin Drood* of the picture of "Signor Jacksonini the clown, in the act of saying, 'How are you to-morrow?' quite as large as life and nearly as melancholy." The conventionalities and artificialities of the stage afforded him constant material

for humorous description, or comment. He has written nothing more genuinely humorous and clever than the account of Mr. Crummles and his company at the Portsmouth Theatre. Who can ever forget Mr. Crummles' expression of honest regret as he recalled the first-tragedy-man, once a member of his company, who "when he played Othello used to black himself all over. That's going into a part as if you felt it. It isn't common, more's the pity"; or the same gentleman's account to Nicholas of his first introduction to Mrs. Crummles:—"The first time I saw that admirable woman, Johnson, she stood on her head on the butt-end of a spear, surrounded by blazing fireworks"? But, although Mr. Dickens constantly introduced the theatre and the theatrical profession, to laugh at their too common absurdities and their adherence to tradition, he believed in them still. His own genius was too dramatic for him not to have strong sympathy with dramatic representations, if at the same time his close observation of human nature, and his keen sense of the ludicrous, forced him to see how little illusive stage illusion commonly is. There is no theme on which he appears to love more to dwell. "The Uncommercial Traveller," and the miscellaneous papers which he contributed to his periodical *Household Words*, are full of exquisite instances in point. He cannot mention Dullborough as "his boyhood's home" without remembering that he feels "like a tenor in an English opera when he does so." He

cannot pass the Dullborough Theatre without calling to mind that there he had first seen "the funny countryman, but countryman of noble principles, in a flowered waistcoat, crunch up his little hat and throw it on the ground, and pull off his coat, saying, 'Dom thee, Squire, coom on with thy fistes, then!' At which the lovely young woman who kept company with him (and who went out gleaning in a narrow white muslin apron with five beautiful bars of five different coloured ribbons across it) was so frightened for his sake that she fainted away." And every one has noted, in reading that uncomfortable and rather dreary story *Hard Times*, that the part which the author himself really enjoyed is that which deals with the interests of the poor horse-riding people—Mr. Sleary, Sissy Jupe, and Master Kidderminster. Mr. Gradgrind's method of gauging all human nature by statistics is a trifle caricatured, and the boasts of Mr. Bounderby a thought conventional; but poor old asthmatic Mr. Sleary's account of his new scene in the circle, as he imparts it to Sissy Jupe, reveals at once where the humourist was really strong and rejoiced in his strength:—"If you wath to thee our Children in the Wood, with their father and mother both a-dying, on a horthe—their uncle a receiving them ath hith wardth, upon a horthe—themthelvth both a-goin' a blackberryin' on a horthe—and the robinth a comin' in to cover 'em with leavth, upon a horthe—you'd thay it wath the completetht thing ever you set your eyeth

on!" Dickens was drawn towards all that multifarious class who live by affording what he conceived to be innocent amusement. It was his favourite doctrine that people must be amused—that they needed it; and no form of pharisaical propriety was more irritating to him than that which advocated the mechanics' institute or the lecture-hall as the only legitimate relief to the working man's hours of labour. The great novelist must himself have known to how many thousands his own writings ministered refreshment and enjoyment after the dull mechanic routine of daily work, and he had no sympathy with that uneven-handed policy which would deny amusement, because it must needs be of a less elevated character, to the social ranks below his own. Hence was it, in part, that while his own tastes led him to enjoy the theatre and all its associations, he looked tenderly and lovingly, and therefore with real humour, upon Mrs. Jarley, and the Punch and Judy men, and Dr. Marygold: yes, down to the poor artist "who had somewhat deranged the natural expression of his countenance by putting small leaden lozenges into his eyes and bringing them out at his mouth."

The success of *The Lighthouse*, performed at Tavistock House in the January of 1856, and subsequently repeated at Campden House, Kensington, for the benefit of the Consumption Hospital at Bournemouth, induced Mr. Wilkie Collins to try his dramatic fortune once more, and

the result was the drama of *The Frozen Deep*, with an excellent part for Mr. Dickens and opportunity for charming scenic effects by Mr. Stanfield and Mr. Telbin. The plot was of the slightest. A young naval officer, Richard Wardour, is in love, and is aware that he has a rival in the lady's affections, though he does not know that rival's name. His ship is ordered to take part in an expedition to the polar regions, and, as we remember, the moody and unhappy young officer, while chopping down for firewood some part of what had composed the sleeping compartment of a wooden hut, discovers from a name carved upon the timbers that his hated rival is with him taking part in the expedition. His resolve to compass the other's death gradually gives place to a better spirit, and the drama ends with his saving his rival from starvation at the cost of his own life, himself living just long enough to bestow his dying blessing on the lovers; the ladies whose brothers and lovers were on the expedition having joined them in Newfoundland. The character of Richard Wardour afforded the actor opportunity for a fine display of mental struggle and a gradual transition from moodiness to vindictiveness, and finally, under the pressure of suffering, to penitence and resignation, and was represented by Mr. Dickens with consummate skill. The charm of the piece as a whole, however, did not depend so much upon the acting of the principal character, fine as it was, as on the perfect refinement and

natural pathos with which the family and domestic interest of the story was sustained. The ladies to whose acting so much of this charm was due are happily still living, and must not be mentioned by name or made the subjects of criticism in this place; but the circumstance is worth noticing as suggesting one reason why such a drama, effective and touching in the drawing-room, would be even unpleasing on the stage. Such a drama depends for its success on a refinement of mind and feeling in the performers which in the present state of the theatrical art must of necessity be rarely possessed, or if possessed must speedily succumb to the unwholesome influences of that class of dramatic literature which alone, if we are to credit the managers, is found to please at the present day. The fact further suggests that if the drama as one of the arts which give high and noble pleasure is to endure, it must be (for a while, at least) under such circumstances as the private theatricals which Mr. Dickens's talent and enterprise have made famous. While the true drama is under persecution in public, it must find shelter in the drawing-rooms of private houses and the willing co-operation of the talent and refinement of private life. No theatrical performance can satisfy an educated taste in which the characters of ladies and gentlemen are sustained by representatives who cannot walk, speak, and act as ladies and gentlemen. Such performances as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Not so Bad as We Seem*, and *The Frozen Deep*, in

which Mr. Dickens with his friends and literary brethren took part, are worthy of being cherished in memory, as showing that the drama is not superseded by prose fiction, as some persons believe, but is still capable of affording high and intense intellectual pleasure of its own.

The production of *The Frozen Deep* has a literary interest for the reader of Dickens, as marking the date of a distinct advance in his career as an artist. It was during the performance of this play with his children and friends, he tells us in the preface of his *Tale of Two Cities*, that the plot of that story took shape in his imagination. He does not confide to us what was the precise connexion between the two events. But the critical reader will have noticed that then, and from that time onwards, the novelist discovered a manifest solicitude and art in the construction of his plots which he had not evinced up to that time. In his earlier works there is little or no constructive ability. *Pickwick* was merely a series of scenes from London and country life more or less loosely strung together. *Nicholas Nickleby* was in this respect little different. In *Copperfield* there is more attention to this specially dramatic faculty, but even in that novel the special skill of the constructor is exhibited rather in episodes of the story than in the narrative as a whole. But from and after the *Tale of Two Cities*, Mr. Dickens manifests a diligent pursuit of that art of framing and developing a plot which there can be little

doubt is traceable to the influence of his intimate and valued friend Mr. Wilkie Collins. In this special art Mr. Collins has long held high rank among living novelists. He is indeed, we think, open to the charge of sacrificing too much to the composition of riddles, which, like riddles of another kind, lose much of their interest when once they have been solved. And it is interesting to note that while Mr. Dickens was aiming at one special excellence of Mr. Collins, the latter was assimilating his style, in some other respects, to that of his brother-novelist. Each, of late years, seemed to be desirous of the special dramatic faculty which the other possessed. Mr. Dickens's plots, Mr. Collins's characters and dialogues, bore more and more clearly marked the traces of the model on which they were respectively based. It is possible, however, that another consideration was influencing the direction of Mr. Dickens's genius. He may have half suspected that the peculiar freshness of his earlier style was no longer at his command, and he may have been desirous of breaking fresh ground and cultivating a faculty too long neglected. As we have said, we believe that his genius was largely dramatic, and that it was the over-powering fertility of his humour as a *descriptive* writer which led him at the outset of his literary career to prose fiction as the freest outcome of his genius. However that may be, he loved the drama and things dramatic; and notwithstanding what might be inferred from the lecture which Nicholas

administers to the literary gentleman in *Nicholas Nickleby*, he evidently loved to see his own stories in a dramatic shape, when the adaptation was made in accordance with the spirit and design of the originator. Most of his earlier works were dramatised, and enjoyed a success attributable not less to the admirable acting which they called forth than to the fame of the characters in their original setting. His Christmas Stories proved most successful in their dramatic shape, and it is difficult to believe that he had not in view those admirable comedians, Mr. and Mrs. Keeley, when he drew the charming characters of Britain and Clemency Newcome. His *Tale of Two Cities* (which, by the way, Mr. Wilkie Collins has somewhere publicly referred to as the finest of his friend's fictions in point of construction) was arranged under his own supervision for the stage, and he seems to have had a growing pleasure in seeing his works reproduced in this shape, for *Little Em'ly*, the latest arrangement of *David Copperfield*, was produced with at least his sanction and approval; and at the present date a version of the *Old Curiosity Shop*, under the title of *Nell*, is announced for immediate production, as having been similarly approved by himself shortly before his lamented death. In the present state of the stage we may well be thankful for pieces so wholesome in interest, so pure in moral, so abounding in unforced humour, as his best stories are adapted to provide.

Not, perhaps, till the next great master of

humour shall have arisen, and in his turn fixed the humorous *form* for the generation or two that succeed him, will Dickens's countrymen be able to form a proximate idea of the rank he is finally to take in the roll of English authors. The shoals of imitators who have enjoyed a transient popularity by imitating all that can be imitated of a great writer—his most superficial and perishable attractions—will have been forgotten, and it must then be seen whether the better portion of Mr. Dickens's genius is of that stuff which will stand the test of changing fashion and habits of thought. We have little doubt that, to use the words with which Lord Macaulay concluded his review of Byron, "after the closest scrutiny, there will still remain much that can only perish with the English language."

CHARLES JAMES MATHEWS

(1803–1878)

THE position occupied by Charles Mathews for so many years on the English stage was an exceptional one, and arose out of exceptional circumstances. His actual advantages of mind and person, and his many and varied natural accomplishments, were not more remarkable than the preliminary training which he undesignedly received from the circumstances of his early manhood. It must never be overlooked, in trying to estimate the groove within which his artistic powers so easily learned to move, that Mathews did not adopt the stage as a profession till he was over thirty years of age, a time when most actors have been ten years in the arduous pursuit of its earlier phases. He came to the profession, that is to say, without having served the usual apprenticeship. For him there was no probationary period of two years in the provinces at two guineas a week. But he had served another apprenticeship of a most valuable kind. He had

had a gentleman's education ; he had mixed with men of all classes, including the leading fashionable society of the day. He had been the favoured friend and companion of aristocratic circles. His accomplishments had had full play as an amateur. He could write, and sing, and draw, and act better than most amateurs. He had studied one art at least with zeal, if not with much chance of attaining ultimate excellence. It was natural, therefore, that after a few experiments he should settle down into that line of character which circumstances had best prepared him for. His natural advantages were quite remarkable. He had, in his prime, the pleasantest face, the most agreeable voice, the most attractive figure, of any actor of his day. It was a distinct and undeniable pleasure even to look at Charles Mathews. And even before he was seen, when his voice was heard behind the scenes rattling off some introductory phrases before entering on the stage, the spectator was aware of an actual feeling of exhilaration. He was too much of an artist, and too well acquainted with the manners that please, to play *at* the audience. He never "mugged at the pit" as we once heard him warn Whiskerandos against doing, in the second act of the *Critic*. But he had a way of letting the audience "catch his eye" every now and then, in a good-humoured, apologetic sort of way that was irresistibly captivating. It was not strange that, being a delightful figure in a drawing-room, he

should prefer to remain such, and to present for the rest of his life innumerable phases of the same thing. A disparaging remark of one of his Australian auditors is preserved for us in his memoir. The critic, who had seen other performers in Mathews' favourite parts, did not at all take to the original representative when he appeared. "He is not half as good as the old man," said this worthy citizen; "he does not act a bit. It is only like a gentleman walking about a drawing-room." This is in substance only a repetition of the famous criticism of Partridge upon Garrick's Hamlet. The performance was so true to life, that the critic could not allow that it deserved the name of acting at all. The proper reply to the Melbourne gentleman's criticism would have been to ask him in turn whether he had ever in his life seen any other actor who *did* look like "a gentleman walking about a drawing-room." It was the rarity, quite as much as the perfection, of this gift in Mathews which accounted for his popularity. But, again, he was popular as a man. His very "difficulties" won him sympathy, and that pity which is akin to personal affection. It was known for years that he was entangled in money troubles, and all the time he was seen to be the most industrious of contributors to the public amusement, acting often in two or three pieces the same evening—acting audiences "*in*," and acting them "*out*"—and with the most imperturbable good humour and un-

flagging spirit. Like Falstaff, "he turned diseases to commodity." His very circumstances were taken advantage of by cunning playwriters and adapters to give a piquant interest to his representation of different characters upon the stage. The character of Mr. Affable Hawk in the *Game of Speculation*—one of the finest of his impersonations—owed unquestionably some of its attractiveness to the coincidences, actual or at least generally accepted, between the circumstances of the character and those of its representative. Mathews himself came to make humorous capital out of his own embarrassments. When he addressed the audience at his farewell benefit, before leaving England on his Australian tour, he called attention to the fact that the performance had been announced without the aid of any advertising, not a single bill or placard had been employed. "Now this," he said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, is a step in the right direction. Time was when my bills were flying all over the town," and we well remember with what an instantaneous burst of appreciation the allusion was received by the entire house. Twenty years before this he was making the same kind of allusion, and taking the public into the same kind of friendly confidence. In a letter to the newspapers, he once had to defend himself against a criticism that had been passed on his spelling of the name "Methuselah" in one of his own comedies, we believe *The Ringdoves*. After gravely

maintaining his position on philological grounds, he added words to this effect, "and I think my opinion on the point is entitled to some respect from the long and intimate connection I have had with the Jews." There were times, however, when the flavour of insolvency that had gathered about his name could not have been altogether pleasant to him. When he was returning to London after his week in Lancaster Castle, he overheard a conversation between two passengers in the same carriage, who did not recognise their travelling companion. "That is where Charley Mathews is confined," said one of them, pointing to the Castle walls. "Really!" said a sympathising lady; "poor fellow!" "Poor fellow!" rejoined the jolly gentleman, with a gingerbread-nut in his mouth, "not at all. He revels in it. Lord bless you, he has been in every prison in England." "I need not say," adds Mathews, who tells the story, "that I did not immediately introduce myself." There was thus a kind of foregone sympathy, not perhaps of the most elevating kind, between Mathews and his public, and this must have contributed to the long and uninterrupted course of his popularity.

There is still more to be said, however, on the side of his Australian critic. "Actor"—in the sense of one who is able to merge his own individuality in very different types of existence—Charles Mathews certainly was not. Within their range his powers were consummate, but that range

was, when all is said, exceedingly narrow. It certainly was an extreme case of the triumph of "quality" over "amount." He had, as Sarcey said of him when he played in Paris, "un naturel exquis, et une incroyable finesse," and this carried him triumphantly through a long series of characters for the most part identical in their features. Mathews himself thoroughly understood within what boundaries his capacity lay, and he was seldom tempted to stray beyond them. He certainly knew as well as his best critics in what qualities he was wholly deficient. "No good actor I have ever seen," says Mr. G. H. Lewes, "was so utterly powerless in the manifestation of all the powerful emotions: rage, scorn, pathos, dignity, vindictiveness, tenderness, and wild mirth are all beyond his means. He cannot even laugh with animal heartiness. He sparkles, he never explodes." Many of these emotions, we may add, if he did not possess the power of expressing, were hardly necessary for any form of high comedy; but some of them, notably pathos and tenderness, were terribly conspicuous by their absence, and more than any other of Mathews' natural deficiencies served to keep his range narrow. Pathos, in particular, he so little understood, that he evidently shrank from its portrayal with something of pain. We remember, for example, his performance of the bachelor-friend, the roaming man of the world who brings such disquiet to the old couple in their country home, in

A Cozy Couple, the Lyceum version of Octave Feuillet's *Le Village*. As long as he was chattering about the delightful independence of foreign travel, and rallying his friends upon their Darby and Joan existence, he was excellent as usual; but when at the end he had to relate how he was once laid by with fever, in a lonely foreign village, and what different feelings coursed through his mind at that time, we remember how he slurred over what might have been the most charming situation in the comedy, leaving an impression of being utterly uncomfortable, and thankful when the episode was at an end. It is this defect in particular which prevents our instituting any comparison between Mathews and some renowned comedians of the present day upon the French stage, especially that delightful artist, M. Delaunay, with whom we have lately been enabled to renew our acquaintance. In many natural gifts of face, figure, and the graces of movement, these two actors were well matched, but the points of likeness are soon exhausted. Of *intensity* Charles Mathews knew nothing: nor can it be fairly said that he was a poetical actor in any real sense. If his acting was akin to any form of poetry, it was to that which the French call *vers de société*; but even here we can hardly admit the comparison, for at least since Praed and Thackeray have written we cannot think of this form of lyric verse apart from tenderness and the charm of sadness.

But, after all, a great actor is to be judged by his strong, and not by his weak points, and Mathews' contributions to the advance of his art are tangible enough. He owed it to his early training amid beautiful sights and sounds, amid the landscapes of Italy and the undying forms of beauty which he went there to study, that he was able to be the first to bring artistic considerations to bear on the acting and the mounting of the modern drama. "When I first came upon the stage," he said in one of his many after-dinner speeches, "I found everything conventional. I don't presume to say that I reformed it, but in my own particular, limited line I, for the first time, broke through the old conventionalities, and have lived to see my example followed till they are all nearly, if not quite, exploded." It should never be forgotten what Mathews accomplished in the way of artistic innovation. In costume, scenery, and general appointments, the *régime* of Mathews and Madame Vestris at the Olympic, Covent Garden, and the Lyceum, was memorable, although to Macready belongs the credit of earlier reforms in the same direction. To these two manager-actors we indeed owe it that the acted drama was first made a "thing of beauty" in other respects than those of histrionic excellence, and in this change was involved more than that of the pleasure actually afforded to the audience. It enlarged the scope of the stage's sympathies. It brought into connexion with it the other arts, and with

this brought artists of all kinds into a new relation with one another—a relation fraught with advantage to all concerned. Side by side with the memoir of Charles Mathews should certainly be read by those who would properly understand the advance of the acted drama during the last forty years, the memoir and journals of Macready. If only to the student of human nature, Macready's "confessions" are among the most profoundly interesting of modern times. In his case, as in that of Mathews, the life which the actor lived, outside of and beyond the strictly professional part of it, was intimately concerned with his qualities as an actor. The two men were radically unlike. Save that they were both actors and managers, and fought strenuously in their respective ways against money difficulties, they had scarcely a point in common. But they both pursued their ideal, different as those ideals were, with zeal and consistency; and both served as a link between many and divers forms of art. It is to them in great part that we owe the encouraging circumstance that the poet, the musician, the painter, and the man of letters are coming more and more to welcome the "poor player" to the ranks of a brother artist, and to recognise that he may be a fellow-worker with them on equal terms.

The success of Mathews, as we have tried to show, was largely due to the fact that he was something more than an actor. If he was lacking

in versatility as an actor, he was eminently versatile as a man. He was allied by sympathy, as well as in actual accomplishments, with half-a-dozen other arts; but he was also allied by sympathy with all sorts of other men, and with many and varied phases of common life. If, during the hard-working years of his career as actor and manager, he was necessarily thrown most with that profession, he had still thirty years of a very different life on which to look back, and from which to draw refreshment. He had reminiscences, if not surroundings, on which to feed his talent. We are persuaded that the gradual elevation of the average of ability, and of *tone*, in the actor's profession depends upon the degree to which the conditions of that profession enable him to take his place on equal terms with his brethren in other walks of art, and with the general current of educated English society. There was a time when the very name of actor, save in a few rare personalities, placed its possessor in a class by himself, and was all but a disqualification for entrance into the common life of the upper classes in England. The very hours during which his art was practised being those devoted elsewhere to social intercourse, proved of itself a very complete barrier between the two classes. But now an obstacle in the actor's path of a totally opposite kind is what he has most to fear. There is now a halo of glory about the head of the successful actor, which

obtains for him so ready a welcome and so exaggerated a tribute of homage, that he is in greater danger from flattery, and the eulogiums of unwise friends, than ever he was of old from the respectable world's neglect. Things will right themselves in time, but in the meanwhile the successful actor has many insidious foes about his path. The remedy for this state of things lies, as we have said, in a more *natural* association among artists of all kinds, and between artists and the wholesome, ordinary, commonplace friendly intercourse of daily society. Artists of all kinds have to beware of the demoralising effects of mutual admiration. It fosters vanity, and it fosters jealousy, the two prevailing foibles of artists, and pre-eminently of actors. In the actor's profession, what needs toning down is the *personal* element. Of too many of them in all time it must be admitted—we are sure that the best among them will be the readiest to admit the truth—that their besetting temptation is that expressed in the Laureate's lines--

> It's always ringing in your ears,
> "They call this man as good as *me*!"

Hitherto there has been some excuse, or at least explanation, of this, in the gulf which has separated the actor from ordinary society. His personal supremacy became his compensation for other things that were denied him, and his defence against the educated world's contempt for his profession. But as the dignity of that profession

rises, and with it the social position of the actor, the desire for personal supremacy ought to yield to, or at least be tempered by, other gains. Pride in the profession, and a sense of its worthiness, and the worthiness of the work it is doing, ought to take the place in some degree of less ennobling aims. But among other reforms, there is one which in any case ought to be early introduced. An actor should not have to play every night, or, if a continuous "run" of a certain piece is necessary, it should be followed by a period of comparative repose, or at least of alternations of leisure evenings. It is only so that the actor can fill his place in some measure in ordinary society, and obtain the benefit of taking friendly and wholesome part in the common interests of the world, among which, after all, are fostered the best and most healthy developments of human character, and therefore the conditions which go to make art also wholesome and fructifying.

TRUE AND FALSE HUMOUR IN LITERATURE

I HAVE chosen so large a theme for my allotted sixty minutes, that I must put severe limits to my mode of treatment, and not even explain or apologise for such limitations. My title limits me in an important respect. "Humour in literature" restricts our examination to the use made of humour in books—in the writer's treatment of human life and character; men's interests, relationships, adventures. Another limitation is supplied by the presence of the word "false." For it really concentrates our attention upon the literature of our own time, or at least a time not far away. Not that false humour has not always been produced in abundance. Of course it has. But then the false humour of other days no longer lives. The books containing it are in our great libraries, and on the shelves of the antiquary, the collector of scarce books, and the student of our literature, who has to study it in its morbid as well as in its healthy forms. But for the general reader the false humour of the past is no

more. Our great classic humourists have survived by virtue of their humour being of the true sort. So it is with false wit. No one now knows anything, for instance, of the later Euphuists, save the young lady or gentleman who gets up the subject for an examination through Samuel Johnson's *Life of Cowley*. Even so, ask an educated man to name three typical specimens of the great humourists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and he will probably name Cervantes, Shakspeare, and Molière. Go on to ask him to name three notable instances of false humour from the same period, and he will have to pause and think, and perhaps pause in vain. Of the spurious kind of such things, however abundant, there are none to leave any mark. "There are none principal," as Rosalind said of women's faults. "They are like one another as half-pence are."

In speaking, therefore, of true and spurious humour in literature, we are to speak of the present day, or the present generation. We believe that whatever is genuine in that humour will, according to its power and originality, endure; that what is not genuine will perish. How much of any of it will be read or remembered fifty years hence may be doubtful. How small a fragment of what modern humourists produce will finally rank as literature, is a solemn question in these days. Books are killing literature. What Wordsworth finely said of overcrowded cities, that "numbers overwhelm humanity," might be

applied to the heavy-laden counters of our booksellers' shops. And this analogy applies eminently to what passes for humour with too many of us. It is, in fact, the humanity in humour that marks it as true. I confess that it is always pleasant to me—that jingle in the first syllables of humour and human. Their derivations are entirely distinct, I need not say. But, even as in Shakspeare's time, men believed that abominable ought to be spelt and pronounced "ab-hominable" —as if from *ab* and *homo*, meaning unhuman, or monstrous—so one could hardly wonder if, to a thoughtful though unphilological mind, humour should thus identify itself with what savours of man and his humanity.

Humour had, indeed, an origin not wholly remote from this. It meant originally (as we all know) the temperament of a man—his predominating affection, or mood, or bias. So the word and its derivatives admitted of a large range of application. When Shakspeare calls a man "humorous" he means that he is changeable, capricious, passing suddenly and often from one mood to another. And a humourist (when the word was newly minted) was a man who exhibited, as an actor or mimic, various characters and humours in his own person by clever imitation. And that being the case, we can quite well understand how an unfavourable character should have attached itself to the term. We know the temptations that assail the talent

of mimicry, and cannot be surprised that the word should have soon acquired and long retained a flavour of buffoonery. And though it has never lost its association with man—his character, and tastes, and peculiarities—it continued for a long while to imply a somewhat degrading treatment of human nature. Until almost our own time, humour and humourist possessed a flavour of something undignified, something rather derogatory to human nature. In the careful classification by critics and moralists of men's talents, humour took its place as the humble sister of wit, to be tolerated because all people were not educated up to the understanding and enjoyment of wit, but to be plainly told her rank — as distinctly wit's inferior. If we were asked to name a truly genuine humourist of the last century, one to whom we owed as much pleasure and profit as to any in literature, we should name, I suppose, Oliver Goldsmith. Yet he deliberately sets down his own opinion, not in a romance or play, but in a critical treatise, that "wit raises human nature above its level; humour acts a contrary part and equally depresses it. To expect exalted humour is a contradiction in terms." This passage occurs in the essay on the "Present State of Polite Literature in Europe." It was written in 1759, before Goldsmith had made any mark as a humourist; and one naturally asks in what light he regarded himself when he came to create the immortal figures of Dr. Primrose, Mr. Hardcastle,

and Beau Tibbs. Did it occur to him that he was degrading human nature when he drew these pictures of it; that to plead for the humour of the *Vicar of Wakefield* as exalting that nature was "a contradiction in terms"? Let us pass on fifty years and ask what others, equally renowned for humour, were saying about this same quality. In the first decade of this century a wit and humourist of the first rank delivered certain famous lectures in the theatre of this Institution, the very room (I suppose) where we are assembled to-night. As a branch of his theme, which was Moral Philosophy, Sydney Smith had to deal with wit and humour, and we all know with what brilliancy he treated it. But he found more to say about wit than about humour; and though he ventured to defend humour against certain stock prejudices current in the world, it was with rather a half-heart and a faltering tongue. It so happened that a certain Professor Millar of Glasgow, of repute as a metaphysician, had then lately said some hard things about humour, very much, indeed, to the same effect as Goldsmith had spoken. Millar, in speculating on the probable effects of advancing civilisation on wit and humour, had anticipated that these effects would be to "encourage wit and to diminish humour," and he had gone on to give his reasons (which Sydney Smith quotes at some length), to the effect that "though humour be commonly productive of more merriment than wit, it seldom procures to the possessor the same

degree of respect"; and further proceeding to explain, Millar shows quite conclusively that by humour he still understands something of the nature of buffoonery and mimicry—the imitation by one man, with appropriate gestures, of another man's oddities. "The man of *wit*," he points out, by way of contrast, "has no occasion to personate folly, or to become the temporary butt of that ridicule which he means to excite." Now, granting Millar's premises, we might well agree with him. If humour is mimicry, however clever, and if the humourist is the "funny man" of a dinner party, his reasoning is most just. And it is very remarkable that Sydney Smith, in thinking fit to quote this opinion, and to differ from it, only differs from it on points of detail. He pronounces it interesting and ingenious, but adds that he is not *quite* convinced by it. And why? No doubt, he goes on to say, the old conventional humorous types of the stage are worn out and will disappear. In that sense civilisation will outgrow much of the humour of the past, and he ends the argument with these remarkable words: "Civilisation improves the humour; but I can hardly allow that it *diminishes* it: in spite of all Professor Millar has said, I am strongly inclined to think there will be more humour, more agreeable raillery, and more facetious remark displayed between seven and ten o'clock this evening, at the innumerable dinners which are to be eaten by civilised people in this vast city, than ten months

could have produced in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth or Henry the Seventh." I almost think that this defence of humour, from the lips of so genuine a master of the art as Sydney Smith, sounds more strange to us than Professor Millar's attack. For most surely when we begin to think of the great humourists to whom we feel we owe so much, it is to something wholly different from "agreeable raillery and facetious remark" that our thoughts are turned. No, it is quite clear that even up to the beginning of the present century the word "humour" retained certain of its original and least worthy characteristics. Facetiousness was still a generally accepted synonym for it. Or at least it must be said that the thing had still a personal and conversational significance, rather than a literary. Its meaning and value as applied to literature seem still unfixed. The question follows, when did these become fixed? When did the profounder importance of humour first begin to assert itself over that of wit, for instance? When did it first rank as an acknowledged fact that the humour of Cervantes' great creations, or Shakspeare's, is a greater gift to the world than the blazing wit of Congreve and Sheridan; that there is, in fact, a humour which "elevates" and a wit which "depresses" human nature?

The study of the growth of our moral ideas in connexion with the changes in the meaning of words is one of the most interesting in the world.

Those of us who survive to see Mr. Murray's great Dictionary arrive at the end of the letter H will find much light doubtless thrown on the question, who first applied the term humourist to those for whom all present here to-night could certainly claim it: who first used it, in a sense that was wholly creditable. Much was happening about the time Sydney Smith delivered these lectures, and much more was to happen within a very few years of that date, to diffuse a literature, genuinely humorous, among a larger circle of readers than humour had before reached. Among other reasons for this, was the change that was coming about in the standard of purity—a change due, of course, to graver changes in the religious standards of the people, into which this is not the place to enter. Exemplary ladies of the last century who left it on record that *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* were admirable for their moral tone, had given place to a generation of mothers for whom these works were meat too strong, and who certainly did not place them needlessly in the way of their daughters. The matchless humour of Fielding was thus narrowing the range of its influence when there began to appear, with no flourish of trumpets, such works of fiction as those of Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen. Then, by and by, appeared the wondrous series of Walter Scott's creations. In these three writers, so radically different in genius, in the field of life they covered, was yet found this gift of treating the common

life about them, and making it exquisitely amusing in the treatment. And yet there mingled with their creations no coarseness, no irreverence, no doubtful morality, no buffoonery. Something of the old synonyms for humour—drollery, grotesqueness, facetiousness—was present no doubt in these creations; in the Antiquary and Bailie Nicol Jarvie; in Mr. Bennet and Sir Walter Eliot, Mrs. Norris and Miss Bates; but to the ordinary reader these talents were exhibited under new and surprising conditions. They represented the "humours" of mankind; in one sense it might be said that they ridiculed mankind, but who could come to the end of one of these stories and feel that mankind had been lowered in the reader's mind in the process? Then after a while came Dickens, bringing with him a whole new world of humour—still further diffusing a literary treatment of it, inviting and winning attention from thousands of intellectual people, who were growing weary of many stereotyped forms of so-called humour on the stage and in society. And among the novelists had been mingled during these years such other masters of the true thing as Charles Lamb, presenting yet new and unsuspected possibilities of a humorous treatment of man and life, for which facetiousness was certainly no adequate description. It appears to me that the change in the general acceptation of humour, which dates from about the middle of this century, arose from the new school of humourists, and notably the

masters of fiction among them, who had made their fame during the previous fifty years, finding their climax in Dickens and Thackeray. It was not of course that these were all necessarily greater or truer humourists than England had produced long before. But their attractiveness, as dealing with the life familiar and contemporary with their readers, making them more widely read and studied, the meaning and method of their humour came to be more carefully analysed. Parts of Dickens's humour were felt to be true, and other parts false; Thackerary was seen to be strong in this place, and comparatively weak in that; even in Walter Scott's most humorous sketches it was felt that the author was sometimes "on his day" (as the cricketers say), and sometimes less so. And, above all, it began to be recognised that the humour in these writers, when it gave the profoundest pleasure, was deeply allied with something much worthier than a sense of the grotesque, or a desire to caricature the propensities of a human being. When readers began to find themselves the better for what was called humorous writing, they naturally began to treat humour itself with more respect. And so they went on to recognise that in the humourists of past days, who had survived as classics, there must have been something worthier than mere "funniness" to make them so survive. It could not have been merely "facetiousness" which obtained for an author access to the hearts of his readers, or enabled him

to remain a living power when the fashions and foibles of the age he described had passed away. So it came about, I think, that we are confronted with the otherwise unexplainable phenomenon that Sydney Smith, dealing with the claims and merits of humour, almost restricts the term to witty and pleasant conversation, and hardly illustrates the term by reference to any literary humourist whatever; and that fifty years later, Thackeray, opening his no less famous series of lectures on the humourists of the last century, uses this striking language: "The men regarding whose lives and stories your kind presence here shows that you have curiosity and sympathy, appeal to a great number of our other faculties besides our mere sense of ridicule. The humorous writer professes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness; your scorn for untruth, pretension, imposture; your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy. He takes upon himself to be the week-day preacher, so to speak. Accordingly, as he finds, and speaks, and feels the truth best, we regard him, esteem him—sometimes love him."

Here, indeed, is a revolution. The wheel of change has turned full circle since Goldsmith (one of the very writers whom Thackeray chose out for special honour) had described the humourist as "degrading human nature." Something had happened to bring it about, account for it how we may. There is, at least, no doubt with which

estimate we shall agree—those of us who feel they owe deep debts of gratitude to the humourists of our literature, who have learned from them, and been made more tolerant and sympathetic. Thackeray is, as he avows, dealing with the men rather than with their writings. His fascinating lectures are largely apologetic. For he has to deal with men such as Addison, and Sterne, and Fielding, and Goldsmith, all displaying many weaknesses and imperfect moralities needing all our indulgence; and he has to show that, for all that, they used their delightful talent to make virtue more attractive, and to draw closer the bonds of human sympathy. It was not so much his purpose to deal with their method. But he might have gone on to show that, if we knew nothing of Addison and Fielding personally, those same qualities he emphasises of truthfulness and sympathy lie at the very root and foundation of the humorous method itself; that, in a word, humour, if not a moral quality, is at least bound up with certain moral virtues of primary importance. It is the paradox of humour that while the idea started, and the word was formed, from an observation of the eccentricities, the grotesquenesses, the abnormal-isms (if I may coin the word) of human nature, it yet depends for its permanent effect on its truthfulness, its fidelity to a certain standard in the humourist's own bosom. Humour, a thing so apparently lawless, yet has laws it cannot disobey. Though ostensibly

ridiculing human nature, and so far lowering it, it must really respect the ideal human nature from which it portrays mainly the deflections. We realise this at once, I think, if we begin to apply a merely intellectual definition to the world's masterpieces of humorous creation. During the Puritan rule in England, when the playhouses were closed and yet the natural human thirst for amusement would somehow find gratification, humorous scenes and episodes from Shakspeare and the other dramatists were detached from their context and acted by stealth in taverns and private houses. There are several such extant in print. Among them, favourite passages were the adventures of Falstaff, and the doings of Bottom the weaver and his friends; and the short scenes thus presented were called *Drolls*,[1] which is as much as to say *Buffooneries*. When we are asked to consider Falstaff humour's crowning masterpiece, or even Bottom the weaver as a buffoon—something but a little removed from the clown of the old Miracle Play, our mind and heart revolt. For, in the instance of Falstaff, the humour of the character is so largely blent, I do not say merely with pathos and tragedy, but with the many mysteries, the inconsistencies and subtleties of the poor human nature we all share, that the mere *amusement* to be got out of it, it seems all but profanity to parade in the foreground. We know nothing about Shakspeare as a man—of his

[1] [See Ward's *English Dramatic Literature*, iii. 280, note.]

politics, his religion, his tastes, or anything else. His personality is hidden behind an impenetrable veil. "Others abide our question," as Matthew Arnold said in his fine sonnet, but Shakspeare evades all such inquiry. We cannot deal with him, as Thackeray dealt with Addison and Dick Steele, and point out that though this and that in his own life and character was faulty, he taught lessons of truth and kindliness in his writings. We have no idea what Shakspeare designed to teach by such characters as Falstaff, and Jaques, and Benedick, and Mercutio. All we can pronounce upon is, how far we have learned something, and had our minds or affections enlarged, by such creations in themselves. Why do we go back to these characters again and again to renew our enjoyment of them? It is not the drollery in a book that stamps it humorous. There is a humour that lies too deep for laughter, even as there are thoughts that lie too deep for tears. Truth and sympathy—combined with a real reverence for certain ideals in the humourist's own mind—these seem to be at the foundation of the Humour that *lives*. Humour must have an implicit relation with such things. The ideal of character will, of course, vary with every humourist, will be imperfect in all. No one would assert, for instance, that Fielding's conception of the ideal male character is to be wholly admired; yet we feel that so far as he believes in it, in presenting his departures from

and variations on the type in his own mind, does he exert his power. It is this that saves Parson Adams—and even Parson Trulliber—from the charge of being "low comedy," or of degrading human nature. We are still (you see) within ear-shot of the old jingle of humour and humane. The characters have the human touch, that is why they delight us. The author is true to a human ideal, and is in sympathy with its trials and its weaknesses. You may well wonder at my caring to insist on truths such as these—truisms you may call them, as if any educated person now doubted them. Nobody is found to question them, I admit, when applied to test the great classics — the typical humorous figures of the world's literature. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, M. Jourdain and Tartuffe, Falstaff and Shallow, Gil Blas and the Archbishop, my Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim—these and how many more have taken their place in a deathless roll of familiar figures from which no fads and fashions of criticism ever attempt to dislodge them. Whatever some of us to-day think in our heart's heart of the method of Cervantes, or Sterne, or Le Sage, we at least conceal our opinion if it is opposed to that of the majority. But it is otherwise in the case of humourists somewhat nearer to our own time, whose place and rank as classics it may still be considered possible to question. Take the instance of Charles Dickens. Like Byron, he is sufficiently near to us for the swing-

ing pendulum of praise and blame, over-*ap*preciation, and over-*de*preciation, not to have yet come to the position it will ultimately hold. I do not myself think that the positive excellences of Dickens ever were over-estimated; but for a long time the splendour and delight of them no doubt diverted attention from his limitations and his blemishes. At the present day all his defects—defects not to be gainsaid—of taste and education are as much commonplaces of criticism as were his brilliant gifts and merits forty years ago. To hear these reckoned up and to acquiesce in them is natural to us. But of late we have become aware of a school of critics among us whose indictment against Dickens goes far deeper than a mere lament over his shortcomings. Hitherto many of us have deplored a certain leaning to melodrama which disfigures and even ruins the effect as a whole of some of his most striking works; and we have sometimes had reason to weep over his pathos other tears than those it was designed to call forth. But we *have* agreed to allow him humour—and some of us to pronounce that on that single ground he took a place among the greatest humourists England has produced. But in the higher criticism of the present day we find even this claim challenged. Not only do we find those young men and women (over whom Mr. Andrew Lang is never weary of making merry) who say they "cannot read" Dickens, but we have among us the literary critic

who speaks of the humour of Dickens as "obsolete."

Yes, *obsolete*; and if this criticism should be confirmed by the generations to come, a revolution in taste will have taken place indeed. For whatever degree of merit we finally allow to Dickens, it cannot be denied that his method is that of a royal band of humourists there is no thought (as yet, at least) whatever of dethroning. The literary pedigree of Dickens is easier to trace than that of most great writers. He was the immediate descendant of Smollett and Fielding, on whom his childish fancy was continuously fed; and they were the products of a school of romance of which *Gil Blas* and *Don Quixote* are the most obvious examples. In Dickens's earliest novels there is hardly a detail of their machinery, and the conduct of their plot, which is not markedly, even ludicrously, the result of his copying these two great masters in his art in the last century. The very names of his characters show it: but for Peregrine Pickle and Roderick Random there would never have been a Nicholas Nickleby. The running of his leading characters in pairs—master and humble companion—as Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, Nicholas Nickleby and Smike, Martin Chuzzlewit and Mark Tapley, together with the incidents so often developed out of adventure on the road and in wayside inns—these are unmistakably due to the controlling fascination of Tom Jones and Partridge, Roderick Random and Strap, which in

their turn would not have been but for Quixote and Panza. Even the absurd custom of interrupting the main narrative with short independent stories—of which *Pickwick*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Master Humphrey's Clock* supply instances—can have no other source than the precedent of Smollett and Fielding, which again comes from the Spaniards, which finally came from the story-tellers of the East, through Spain's contact with the Moors. But in speaking of Dickens's *method* being the same as theirs, I mean something still far different from, and deeper than, these outward signs. These may indeed be "obsolete," and few will regret their loss. In this sense, much of the "vehicle of humour" in even the greatest must become old-fashioned. But Dickens drew inspiration of more value than this from the models who formed him. They taught him other secrets of their power: they taught him things that can never be obsolete, save in a literature which is already passing to decay. "They gave him eyes, they gave him ears," as Dorothy Wordsworth gave to her young brother—these teachers of Dickens, who "were with him when a boy." They taught him, as I believe, that one secret of humour (though grotesque, though caricature, though eccentric) is yet *Truth*; and the other, while seeming to take all mankind for its laughing-stock, is yet Sympathy and Charity.

This is what I mean when I say that Dickens, however low the criticism of to-day may rate

him in comparison with those humorous writers of fiction and essayists on whom he was formed, yet inherited and carried on their method—I believe the only vital and enduring method. Only we are so busy in dilating on his blemishes, and pluming ourselves on having left them far behind, that this more important fact is passing unobserved. With all his blemishes, Dickens had a sovereign tenderness for human nature, and reverence for it, and the sense, which never (at his best) deserted him, that he shared that human nature with the creations of his fancy. His power as a humourist lay in his never patronising it, never judging and describing it from a point of superiority over it, but from a position by its side. And I would insist upon the very same quality in that other great novelist and humourist with whom it seems so obvious to contrast him—I mean Thackeray. Immense as are the differences between the two men—in genius, education, temperament—still, for the purposes of the student of true humour, their points of resemblance are more striking than their points of difference. In both the secret of their enduring power lies in that same union of true reverence for human nature, and sympathy with it, and self-identification with it. And this last phrase I ought to explain. It was a favourite device of Thackeray's, you remember, to stand in a sense aloof from his characters—to survey them, and criticise, and comment on them, as it were from a distance.

In *Vanity Fair* he spoke of his characters as puppets he had been pulling the strings of, to be put away in their box at the end of the play. But this was merely an artifice of Thackeray's—one purely literary and rhetorical. It implied no assumption of being himself something wiser and better than common human nature, and thus watching their antics and vain aims and aspirations from a loftier position. That fundamental defect in a humourist you never notice in Thackeray or in Dickens—they never *patronise* human nature. And I emphasise this characteristic, which they share with the greatest of their predecessors, because the one great name as novelist and humourist which we should all probably couple with theirs in the literature of the last half-century, George Eliot, does mark a departure in this respect. When George Eliot, more than thirty years ago, blazed forth upon the world in her *Scenes from Clerical Life* as a writer of quite extraordinary gifts, her humour (on its lighter, more jocular side) was at once seen to be largely formed upon the style of Dickens. Her ways of describing common incidents and common life displayed some even of Dickens's least worthy mannerisms. I would refer to the description of the paupers to whom Mr. Amos Barton ministered, or to the description of middle-class life at Milby in *Janet's Repentance*. But the critic who noticed this must also have noticed that where the manner was the manner of Dickens the

method was not his. The enumeration of the foibles and commonplacenesses of the Philistine inhabitants, whose characteristics are so funnily set forth, is for the most part not genial, but sarcastic. The writer stands rather *above* than by the side of the vulgar and ignorant population she is describing. The writer is witty at their expense rather than lets them exhibit their humour by development from within. It is not easy to illustrate such charges by short extracts. But take the following sentence: "The Rev. Amos was very fond of chess, as most people are who can continue through many years to create interesting vicissitudes in the game, by taking long-meditated moves with their knights, and subsequently discovering that they have thereby exposed their queen." Now, though this is clearly meant to be droll, I submit that it is not humorous, because it does not rest upon truth, and it is contemptuous —a light way of dismissing chess-players as frivollers much below serious consideration. Here the *manner* (to preserve the distinction I have used) is Dickensian, but not the *method.* Or, again, when the Parish Clerk (in, I think, *Silas Marner*) speaks of "when me and the Parson does the Cursing on a Ash-Wednesday"; this is grotesque, and raises a laugh, but it lacks the vital element of humour—fidelity to nature. It is not natural to the typical parish clerk to put the duties he is engaged in in a ludicrous or even trivial light. It is not, in short, the

character developing itself truly, but it is the author speaking for him, and expressing a general pitying contempt for the Commination Service. The puppet moves its head and arms, but the showman below is providing the dialogue. And it is the one indispensable condition of a novelist's or dramatist's claim to humour, that his creations should be self-evolved and self-consistent. Is it not so in the king of all creators of humorous types—Shakspeare? When he is at his best, who ever is reminded of the author standing behind his character? When Falstaff says, "If I have not forgotten what the inside of a church is like, I'm a shotten herring";—when Benedick justifies to himself his change of mind about marrying, "I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have railed so long against marriage; but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and sentences and such paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humour? No! the world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live to be married. Here comes Beatrice! by this day, she's a fair lady";—or, once more, when Mrs. Quickly, in that masterpiece of humour and tragedy, the description of Falstaff's death, adds, "He cried out God, God, God, three or four times! Now I, to comfort him, bade him he

should not think about God!"—who, I would ask, ever thought of the mighty humourist to whom it was all in fact due? The humour is so true to the character and to the situation—in such flawless sympathy with the human nature described—that it almost seems as if it was the work of nature's very hand, without the intervention of a human agent at all. This it is, to be a master of humour at its highest; this it is, while most keenly alive to the laughable in human nature, to feel with equal force, in poor Othello's words, "the pity of it! the pity of it!"

We are all, and ought to be, so grateful to these great humourists who have done so much to make life brighter and happier, that it is an ungracious task, even for an analysis like that we have set before us this evening, to compare and contrast, still more to pick out faults and defects. I believe the truer and more cultivated our sense of humour, the wider, not the narrower, will be the circle of the writers we appreciate. If we have no patience with those who persist in denying his full merits to Dickens because they admire Thackeray, or *vice versa*, or who cannot read either because George Eliot is so much more to their taste, we are still at liberty to trace, by the light of their example, in what direction the modern taste for humour is travelling, and to mourn over it if it seems to be taking the wrong path. We live in an age

which is a strange mixture of over-fastidiousness and under-fastidiousness, and it is surely a sufficient illustration of it that many who find they have outgrown the humour of Dickens and Thackeray, yet seem to find unqualified delight in Mark Twain or Mr. Gilbert's Savoy extravaganzas. For I think I am not mistaken in putting forth these as the representative humorous diet of the English middle class at the present day. And I say "representative" because they show those elements, in what passes for humour, which belong to a large and immensely popular class of literature—the mixture of the grotesque and the scornful. I am speaking now of the under-fastidious. The over-fastidious find their humour in other directions, but the element common to both is that the dominant humour at the present day provided for all classes is a humour which is really not humour, but a kind of debased wit, out of which have departed the salts which constitute humour and keep it pure—the salt of reverence, and the salt of charity. The humour which is most popular in England just now is built, not upon sentiment, but upon cynicism. I have kept this word "sentiment" out of my lecture thus far, because it is so difficult to use it in a sense that will command respect. It has had a disastrous history, as you all know. It was dragged through the mire by the second- and third-rate humourists of the last century, and Sir Peter

Teazle gave the thing so called its *coup de grâce* in a famous scene in the *School for Scandal.* If we translate it from Latin into English and call it "feeling," we shall hardly fare better, for Mackenzie contrived to make a "Man of Feeling" (who shed tears as continuously as Job Trotter) no less nauseous than a man of "sentiment." But the true thing—which we might almost re-christen "sympathy"—is an undying factor, for all that, in the composition of humour. To most persons "sentiment" means little more than "sentimentality"; but the one thing is as distinct from the other as was the eloquence of our lately departed statesman from the rhetoric of the average popular preacher. And if it was "sympathy" that gave John Bright's eloquence its real power, so it is sympathy that makes humour either strong or enduring. And in this sympathy, which includes *reverence*, I fear it must justly be said that the popular humour of to-day is wanting—and, in wanting it, forfeits all just claim to the title. And I further venture to think that, in so far as the methods of the great humourists gone before us are out of favour with us, and seem to be poor and tame in comparison with our own, it is not because we have *outgrown* them, but because we have *degenerated* from them. It is not they who are not good enough for *us*, but *we* who are not good enough for *them.* I know that there are those who, while they sneer at Dickens, yet profess to retain

unbounded appreciation of Shakspeare or Sterne or Goldsmith. But I doubt in many cases if such criticism is quite sincere. Shakspeare is on our shelves and on our stages; but I do not see him much taken down from the shelf, or repaired to on the stage, save when he is furbished out with transformation scenes. And the *Vicar of Wakefield*, if familiar to us, is more so from the canvas of a Leslie or a Newton than from much personal converse with him. We are hypocritical, often, even in our amusements. The truth is that, for whatever cause, the present fashion in humour (even if it be but a passing fashion) is the cynical, and in our tastes, as in other things, we cannot serve two masters.

We must all have noticed how monotonous is the flavour of most of the humour served up to us at this day, and how soon weary we become of this sameness. We read the lighter articles in some periodical publication, and come to find after a while that however different the topics from which they start, at the end the resultant effect upon us is the same; and if we further analyse the cause we shall find that it is *scorn* that is the invariable and the wearying tone about it—scorn, too, which is not earnest enough to take the form of misanthropy, as with Swift; or even of a moral indignation against particular offenders, as with Pope. In the case of both these masters, their humour is bound up with something earnest, and often with something that

we can respect. The popular variety of modern scorn, in writing called humorous, is the *flippant*. And flippancy may be defined as the attitude which assumes that nothing in heaven or earth matters very much, and that any one is a simpleton who thinks it does. "That man had never kindly heart, nor ever sought to better his own kind, who first wrote satire with no pity in it." So wrote Lord Tennyson; but the "satire with no pity in it," if prompted by a genuine aversion, is a more respectable thing than the satire which has no core of reality in it at all, but is mere *badinage*, or chaff, made out of the one simple prescription—a contempt for what once upon a time was considered rather worthy of respect than otherwise. Take some serious interest of human nature and suddenly and unexpectedly treat it as if it were not serious—that is the key to much of the popular humour of the day. The American drolls have used it largely. You know to whom I refer, and will not suppose me forgetful of such true humourists, scholars, and poets as J. R. Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes. And these American drolls (not the American humourists) have largely influenced the wags who provide us over here with a corresponding entertainment. The name of "topsy-turvydom" has been coined for one of the most familiar of these forms. This, of course, is mere drollery, a clever feat of intellectual posture-making, and is absolutely devoid of any claim to be called humour.

For its essence is contempt, its method is cynical, its quality is inhuman. And by far the most ignoble kind of cynicism is the cynicism, not of conviction, but of having no convictions: the cynicism of caring nothing for anybody or anything, if only a laugh can be got out of it.

It is very curious and instructive how the once hackneyed criticism of Mr. Thackeray's writings has, for very shame, ceased from off men's lips. I mean the criticism that he was so cynical, and took so very low a view of human nature, and so forth. Such a criticism may have had some meaning once; but when we contrast the alleged cynicism of Thackeray with the absolutely heartless cynicism of the modern so-called humourist, his satiric touch rises into nobility and perfectest charity by comparison. Take the character of Rawdon Crawley (a masterpiece of humorous creation if ever there was one), and say whether the charge of cynicism is better deserved by that or by the writing of some wit or journalist who regards the whole field of human life and interests as the raw material for humorous copy. I have found more of the poison of mischievous contempt for human nature in a single magazine article than could be sucked from out all Mr. Thackeray's works. Mere mockery, however brilliant and perfect in style, has no life in it. Perhaps that is why it is so largely found in periodical literature. "Periodical" is really tantamount to "mortal." In the *Idylls of the King*, Tennyson tells us of one

of the knights who was deformed, and was, though unpleasantly sarcastic, tolerated in consideration of his infirmity. "No knight of Arthur's noblest dealt in scorn," the Laureate tells us; but if one of them had some bodily blemish or infirmity making him at a disadvantage with others, "scorn was allowed as part of his defect." I have sometimes thought that the cynical mood is sometimes tolerated by us in consideration that its possessor will only be read during one week, or one month, and then will (in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred) pass out of memory and out of literature for ever.

When I insist (perhaps *ad nauseam*) that the salt of all humour worthy the name is sympathy and reverence, I have to risk the objection of approaching the subject from too professional a view, and of being taunted with Lamb's translation of Coleridge's Horatian motto—*Sermoni propiora* ("Properer for a sermon"). And if I were using "reverence" in any sense usually restricted to religious matters, I should bow to the criticism by anticipation. But modern humour does not, to do it justice, usually seek to get its effects out of a comic use of things conventionally called sacred. Its irreverence is rather towards earth than towards heaven—a contempt for common, uninteresting human nature. Indeed sympathy and reverence are one, at the root. Sympathy may stand for both. The insolence, whether broad or refined, which makes so much of what is

offered as humour, lies in its lack. Take the lowest form of it which in these days attracts, the so-called humorous dialogue of a farcical comedy. It is almost wholly derived from the characters being as rude to one another as it is possible to bear, without kicking and being kicked. This is "*un*educated insolence" adapted to uneducated tastes. But there is an "educated insolence" (to borrow the Greek philosopher's definition of "wit," *πεπαιδευμένη ὕβρις*), which is no less insolent because it is well-bred in style, and because it is at the expense, not of this or that individual, but of the human nature we all share.

"Educated scorn,"[1] so Aristotle defined what we translate "wit." (In another place, by the way, where a certain apostle told the Corinthians it was "not convenient," we know it as "jesting.") And "educated scorn" cannot be bettered as a definition of what humour has come to, especially if we allow scorn to include flippancy and an accentuated indifference to common human interests. I have ventured to say that I think a great literary figure of our day, George Eliot, rather prepared the way for those, who had not a thousandth part of her genius and her knowledge, to analyse and criticise human nature from a serene height of superiority —"lying beside their nectar," and directing their

[1] [The reader who does not know his Aristotle may need to be warned that the lecturer is here introducing into the word *ὕβρις*, for his immediate purpose, a moral element which it lacks in the Greek philosopher; "a sauciness chastened" or "within bounds" would come nearer to the meaning of the Greek.]

criticisms from that height. I have always thought (though I know it is not the prevailing judgment) that for that reason George Eliot was less successful in humour than in any other of her wonderful gifts; that she was, indeed, rather eminent as a wit than as a humourist. And in saying so I have distinctly in mind the character most obviously certain to be quoted against me—Mrs. Poyser. But I think that since George Eliot's day a school of humourists has risen who have thought they could conjure with her method, while not having anything of the native force and brilliance which, alas, cannot be had for the wishing. Culture alone will not make a George Eliot, and to criticise and describe the ways of humdrum folk from the vantage-ground of an academical superiority, when there is absolutely no humorous sense at all in the writer (and this is a phenomenon we have witnessed in our day), is to make *one* distinction between true and false humour very keenly perceptible.

Civilisation, then, in a sense, may seem to be doing what Professor Millar said it would—driving out humour and cultivating wit. I have quoted Goldsmith, and remarked that Millar was really repeating his dictum that humour degraded human nature, and wit exalted it. But wit, remember, had in those days a more exalted meaning. It retained something of Pope's definition, "What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed," and included something of perfected and polished

good sense. And as humour had a correspondingly low signification, that of something above buffoonery, they and we are somewhat at cross purposes. With them, wit was the high thing that was to kill the lower. With us, humour is the nobler faculty, and, in the whirligig of time, it does seem to be yielding to the superior attractions of a so-called "wit." For humour, if it loses its moral quality, becomes, in fact, a debased form of wit. The "wit" of popular acceptation may be no longer the wit of Goldsmith's. He may rather be the wit of Pascal's definition, when that great thinker said, "Diseur de bons mots, mauvais caractère!"

I need not say that true humour is not dead, though it has to hold its own against many counterfeits. Some of the professors of the counterfeit kind have had the wit, or the grace, to recognise that what they offer needs some apology, for they have termed their production the "*new* Humour," we may suppose in contrast with the *old*. But the old methods, let us be thankful, are still with us—now with Mr. Anstey Guthrie, now with Mr. Henry James, now with the author of *A Window in Thrums*, now with Mr. Rudyard Kipling, when he allows the nobler and more genial side of him to have free course. Let us show our gratitude for the real thing in whatever form it comes, for it can do us nothing but good. Only remember that its true test is that it shall enlarge our sympathies, not narrow

them; that it shall make all mankind more important to us, and not merely our little cliques and coteries. Cultivated insolence—a jocular criticism of human nature, with no heart in it; —from *this* the continued study of our Chaucer, our Shakspeare, our Fielding, our Scott, our Miss Austen, and our Charles Lamb, and all the immortal and delightful band of the genuine humourists, alone will save us.

SIR GEORGE ROSE[1]

BUT for the circumstance that the word "wit" has so large a range of meanings, we might have been led to entitle this article "The Last of the Great Wits." For the distinguished lawyer and scholar whose name we have placed in its stead leaves behind him no one whose reputation for readiness and brilliancy of repartee seems likely ever to vie with his own. It is of this rare faculty that we propose to speak on the present occasion.

A memoir of the late Sir George Rose will doubtless appear in due course, in which full justice will be done to his memory as a lawyer, a scholar, and a much-valued friend. At present we confine ourselves to reproducing some samples of that ready wit or playful humour by which he had been famous for half a century to thousands in his own profession, but not, we believe, to any great extent beyond it. His good things were

[1] [The *Dictionary of National Biography* states that he was born 1st May 1782, educated at Westminster School and Peterhouse, Cambridge; called to the Bar at the Inner Temple, 1809; in 1827 made K.C., and a Bencher of his Inn; knighted in 1837; and in 1840 made a Master in Chancery. He died 3rd December 1873.]

eagerly listened for and rapidly circulated in Bar circles; but they did not pass into society at large in any degree proportionate to their merit. Many of them, indeed, had a more or less pronounced legal flavour, and some were too purely technical to be understood by the uninitiated; but, setting these aside, there yet remain a number which appeal at once to a much larger audience.

To praise beforehand the excellence of a story that one is about to tell is notoriously a perilous course, and the same thing might be said of a preliminary eulogy upon a collection of such stories. But before proceeding to cite a few of Sir George Rose's *bons mots*, it may be allowed us to call attention to some of their leading characteristics. In the first place, their singular *promptness* will strike the reader. The mental rapidity with which the retort follows upon the question or remark which provokes it is one of the most striking of the surprises to which the pleasure derived from wit has been attributed by the metaphysician. In the case of nine out of ten of the anecdotes of Sir George Rose, the wit of his reply must have been, from the very nature of the case, generated upon the spot. Again, though the wit is to a great extent verbal, the pleasure which it affords is but slightly due to the mere happy ingenuity by which words are tortured. The pun is rather the vehicle for the wit, than the wit itself. There is a prejudice, and a natural one, against punning and punsters. The simple

play upon words is so easy, that it is sure to be resorted to by persons of no real humour, imagination, or mental vigour of any kind. But in the hands of a man of genius—a Hood, a Lamb, or a Sydney Smith—the play upon words invariably involves a play upon ideas, and often in consequence suggests feelings of admiration and delight different in kind, as well as degree, from those produced by analogies or discordances merely verbal. The word-quibble is lost and forgotten in the glow and warmth of the envelope of humour or sentiment in which it is enwrapped. In short, when the pun is the result of mere quickness in detecting analogies between words, it soon becomes tiresome and painful; where, on the other hand, it is the suggestion of true humour, it partakes of its originating force, and is itself instinct with humour. It is something more than the ingenuity or the promptness of Sir George Rose's puns that affords delight; it is that which, for want of a better word, we may call their "drollery." They may be far-fetched, or even, on the other hand, may be based upon verbal analogies that have been often seized upon and made use of by jokers in all times; but in the particular use made of his material, Sir George never failed to be amusing. Some of his legal jokes turned, as we have said, upon legal phraseology which is quite unintelligible to the outside world. A few of the less abstruse, however, may be cited here. When, some years ago, the practice of having daily prayers

in our churches was still a novelty, Sir George's own clergyman called upon him and asked him his opinion as to its adoption. Sir George replied: "I see no objection whatever; but I hope that in my own particular case—*service at the house will be deemed good service.*" Again, when a singularly matter-of-fact gentleman had related a story in which the listeners had failed after all their efforts to discover the faintest spark of humour, Sir George accounted for the circumstance at once. "Don't you see?" he said; "he has *tried a joke*, but *reserved the point!*"

The late Sir John Rolt, meeting him one day in the later years of his life, remarked to him, "I am very glad, Sir George, to see you looking so well. You do not look a day older than when you used to come among us." Sir George pointed to his hair, and said, "This *D—d poll* may not disclose the fact; but" (opening his mouth, and pointing to a certain gap in his front teeth) "*this Indenture witnesseth.*" It may be added for the instruction of the laity that a *Deed poll* is a kind of deed properly distinguished from an indenture. It must have been on a similar occasion when, his doctor assuring him that he would live to be a hundred, he promptly replied, "Then I suppose my coffin may be called a 'cent'ry box.'" When we thought of calling Sir George "the last of the great wits," we were in part deterred by the familiar line of Dryden, in which great wit and madness are spoken of as near akin. A sounder

mind than Sir George Rose's could hardly have been found among his contemporaries; and that it was accompanied by the sound frame is evidenced by his attaining to the ninety-third year of his age, and only passing away at the end "of a gentle decay."

The fertility of his fancy never failed him, even under the most unpromising and incongruous circumstances. When he was appointed one of the four judges of the (now extinct) Court of Review, he came to Lincoln's Inn with his colleagues to be sworn in. Some friend congratulating him on his access of dignity, he observed, "Yes! here we are, you see—*four by honours!*" In some case that was being heard before him in this court, it appeared that a picture of "Elijah fed by the ravens" had been given as part of some security. He handed down a note to one of the counsel in the case: "This is, so far as I am aware, the first instance on record of an *accomodation bill*."

A friend meeting him one day in Lincoln's Inn Fields, with his left eye greatly swollen and inflamed, remonstrated with him, adding that he was surprised Lady Rose should have let him go out of doors in such a condition. "Ah!" replied Sir George, "I am out *jure mariti*" (my right eye).

Dining on one occasion with the late Lord Langdale, his host was speaking of the very diminutive church in Langdale, of which his lordship was patron. "It is not bigger," said

Lord Langdale, "than this dining-room." "No," returned Sir George, "*and the living not half so good.*"

Sufficient has been already quoted to show that the verbal wit of the late Sir George Rose has a character of its own which distinguishes it from that of other famous jokers and bears the stamp of his own mint. Strictly speaking, it is its humour which predominates and is the real source of its effectiveness. It is amazingly quick, ingenious, and appropriate; but it is also eminently laughable. Less elaborate than Hood's, never ill-natured as was too often Jerrold's, it drew the most unpromising material into its crucible, and forced it to yield on the instant some grains of truest gold. One great feature in its effectiveness is its brevity. "All pleasantries," Voltaire has somewhere said, "ought to be short." Sir George Rose's wit was sometimes expressed in a single word. On one occasion, when a new serjeant had been created, and it became his duty, according to custom, to present rings to the judges, inscribed with the usual brief "posy" in Latin, Sir George indicated his appreciation of the then existing company of serjeants by suggesting for the motto in question, *Scilicet* (silly set). On another occasion, when dining with the Inner Temple, observing some salt-cellars in frosted silver, made in the shape of the "winged horse" of the Inner Temple, he merely pointed to one and murmured—"The *White Horse cellar.*"

It would convey a wrong idea to say that Sir George Rose joked in season and out of season, for it might imply that his jokes were sometimes unseasonable. But few wits have ever been so uniformly what Oxford men of the present day call "on the spot." And though, as happens when the spirit of word-crushing is strong, the wine was not always of uniform goodness and strength, still, even in his most careless trifles, there was seldom wanting that element of *grotesqueness* to which we have already called attention. When he was dining one day with some friends, the outdoor servants had been enlisted into the service of the dining-room, and it chanced that one of them, in carrying out a tray of glass, as he left the room stumbled and fell with a heavy crash. "What is that?" exclaimed Sir George's next neighbour, in great alarm. "Oh, nothing," he replied; "only the coachman gone out with his *break*." We will hope that the master and mistress of the house had a proper appreciation of a joke, and that the awkward servitor's conduct was condoned for the sake of the merriment it promoted in the assembled guests. Happy faculty which can thus make a *contretemps* minister to mirth, and, like Ophelia, "turn to favour and to prettiness" the petty disasters and annoyances of every day! With Sir George the ruling passion was irrepressible. He was at a funeral, on a bitterly cold day in winter, and his companion in a mourning coach

called his attention to the poor men in scarves, and bearing staves, who were trudging along by the side of the carriage. "Poor fellows," said his companion, "they look as if they were frozen!" "Frozen!" retorted Sir George; "my dear friend, they are *mutes*, not *liquids*." As a companion to this droll "improvement" of a funeral may be quoted his remark on an acquaintance, who had died of dropsy—"He has gone to *Gravesend by water*."

A friend who had been appointed to a judgeship in one of the colonies, was long afterwards describing to Rose the agonies he had suffered on the voyage out from sea-sickness. Sir George listened with much interest to the recital of his friend's sufferings, and then said, in a tone of deep commiseration, "It's a great mercy you did not throw up your appointment." A friend has reminded the present writer of a curiously similar unfeeling remark made by S. T. Coleridge to a schoolmaster with whom he was making the trip to Margate in the ante-steamboat days by the old Margate Hoy, which, by the way, Charles Lamb has so admirably described. Coleridge watched his friend's efforts over the side, and at length said, "Why, Robinson, I didn't expect this from you; I thought you brought up nothing but young gentlemen!" Here is a remarkable instance of great wits leaping together; and the coincidence as well as the humour of the two replies may perhaps be our

apology for the inelegance of the two suggested pictures.

"The man who would make a pun," said Dr. Johnson, "would also pick a pocket." Tradition has ascribed this dictum to the great man, though the pages of Boswell fail to supply authority for the precise remark. The fact, however, remains unimpeached of Johnson's aversion to the habit of punning. Boswell did not agree with his great master. "For my own part," he says, "I think no innocent species of wit or pleasantry should be suppressed; and that a good pun may be admitted among the smaller excellences of lively conversation." We agree with the biographer rather than with his hero, though he may be accused of begging the question when he begins by terming puns an "innocent" species of wit. Certain it is, however, that good puns give pleasure, just as bad ones are tedious and irritating, and it must be the prevalence of the latter that has brought disrepute upon the thing itself. Even Johnson could tolerate one when it was made the companion of a pleasant piece of flattery. "He liked your compliment so well," said old Sheridan to Boswell, "that he was willing to take it with *pun-sauce*." Sir George Rose's compliments were often served with this peculiar sauce, but the sauce was rather the actual medium of the compliment than an ornamental addition which could be removed at pleasure. The pun became identified through its informing spirit with the

tenderness and elegance of the thought to be conveyed. Sir George Rose being introduced one day to two charming young ladies, whose names were Mary and Louisa, he instantly added with a bow, "Ah, yes! *Marie-Louise*—the sweetest *pear* I know": a compliment almost worthy of being coupled with that most beautiful one of Sydney Smith suggested by the sweet-pea. A young lady walking with him in the garden paused to examine a favourite flower on which she had bestowed great pains. "I am afraid, Mr. Smith," she said, "that this pea will never come to perfection." "Then allow me," said he, taking her politely by the hand, "to lead perfection to the pea!" In short, the worth of a pun and its chance of permanent endurance depend on the higher qualities of the mind from which it sprang. The pun takes its colouring from the mind and nature of the punster. In Swift they are clever and hard; in Jerrold, clever and bitter; in Hood, clever and informed with the true genius of a poet; in Sir George Rose, clever and partaking of the gaiety, the playfulness, the versatile genius of a scholar, tempered by a most lovable nature. In these respects his wit appears to us to resemble that of Charles Lamb more than of any other with whom we can compare him; though in other respects the individuality of the two minds is markedly different. But, like Lamb, Sir George Rose combined "the frolic and the gentle"; and, like Lamb, amid the mourning of

many friends, he has "vanished from his lonely hearth."

Nothing in the way of compliment could be happier, it seems to us, than two incidents in his friendship, which was long and intimate, with the late Master of the Temple. A report having originated that Archdeacon Robinson was to be elevated to the episcopal bench, Sir George said, "Well, if he must leave the Temple, I hope it will be by *Mitre Court*."

On another occasion, when he met his old friend walking, apparently deep in thought, in the neighbourhood of the Temple, he inquired playfully, "Well, Master, and what are you dreaming about?" "Oh!" said the Archdeacon, quoting the first lines of the familiar satire of Horace, "I was *nescio quid meditans nugarum*." "But then with you, dear friend," was the singularly felicitous reply, "it is always in the *Via Sacra*."

Nothing more tender, more charming, was ever said, surely, than this, and no better justification could be offered for the use and cultivation of that faculty of wit and humour, or some *tertium quid* unknown to dialecticians, which is born out of the union of the two faculties.

"When wit is combined with sense and information," thus writes one of the greatest of modern wits; "when it is softened by benevolence and restrained by strong principle; when it is in the hands of a man who can use it and despise it, who can be witty and something much *better* than

witty, who loves honour, justice, decency, good-nature, morality, and religion, ten times better than wit ;—wit is *then* a beautiful and delightful part of our nature. There is no more interesting spectacle than to see the effects of wit upon the different characters of men, than to observe it expanding caution, relaxing dignity, unfreezing coldness — teaching age and care and pain to smile, extorting reluctant gleams of pleasure from melancholy, and charming even the pangs of grief. It is pleasant to observe how it penetrates through the coldness and awkwardness of society, gradually bringing men nearer together, and, like the combined force of wine and oil, giving every man a glad heart and a shining countenance. Genuine and innocent wit like this is surely the *flavour of the mind!* Man could direct his ways by plain reason and support his life by tasteless food ; but God has given us wit and flavour and brightness, and laughter and perfumes, to enliven the days of man's pilgrimage, and to support uneasy steps over the burning marle."

The wit of the subject of the present paper could hardly have been better described had he sat for the portrait.

Not less remarkable than the quickness of his repartee was his gift of impromptu rhyming and extempore epigram. Many of these fugitive *jeux d'esprit* have long enjoyed a conversational currency in legal circles without having, in many cases at least, found any resting-place in print.

Some of them carry us back in the circumstances of their origin to a generation already becoming historical. It was James Smith, of *Rejected Addresses* celebrity, himself an attorney, whose cruel reflection on his own calling provoked a famous retort from Sir George Rose. The two epigrams have been often quoted, but may be excused for making one more last appearance in this company. James Smith had written thus—or "to this defect," for there is more than one version of the lines :—

In Craven Street, Strand, ten attorneys are found—
And down at the bottom the barges abound.
Fly, Honesty, fly to some safer retreat,
For there's craft in the river—and craft in the street!

To which Sir George replied, impromptu :—

Why should Honesty fly to some safer retreat,
From barges and lawyers, 'od rot 'em?
The lawyers are *just* at the top of the street,
And the barges are *just* at the bottom.

The following ingenious epitome of the arguments and ruling in a certain case carries us back to the days of Lord Chancellor Eldon. Mr. Vesey, the Reporter (of the Vesey and Beames Reports), being called out of court, begged Sir George (then Mr. George Rose) to take a note for him of the proceedings. The nature of the addresses on each side could not, it was felt, have been indicated more happily than in the lines

which Mr. Rose submitted to the Reporter on his return :—

Mr. Leach made a speech,
  Angry, neat, and wrong:
Mr. Hart, on the other part,
  Was right, but dull and long.
Mr. Parker made that darker
  Which was dark enough without:
Mr. Cook quoted his book;
  And the Chancellor said 'I doubt.'

The lines were soon in every one's mouth, and a few weeks later when Mr. Rose was counsel in a case before the Chancellor, Lord Eldon having decided against him added in a tone which could not be misunderstood, "and in this case, Mr. Rose, the Chancellor does *not* doubt."

Sir George was specially fond of epitomising famous cases in a few lines of extempore verse. The following abridgment of the Gorham case has not, probably, hitherto appeared in print :—

Bishop.

Baptized, a baby
Becomes *sine labe:*
So the act makes him,
So the Church takes him.

Contra.

But is he fit?
We very much doubt it.
  Devil a bit
Is it valid without it!

Adjudication.

Bishop non-suited :
Priest unrefuted :
Be instituted ·

Reasons for Judgment.

Bishop and Vicar,
Why will you bicker
Each with his brother ?
Since both are right,
Or one is quite
As wrong as the other.

Costs.

Deliberative,
Pondering well,
Each take a shell,
The lawyers the native !

The following is entirely in his manner, for he was never weary of making his jokes on what appeared to him frivolous questions of ecclesiastical usage, but we cannot vouch for its authorship :—

What robe the clergy ought to wear
I own I neither know nor care,
A black dress or a white dress.
Vexed with a trouble of my own—
A wife—who preaches in her gown,
And lectures in her night-dress.

At a legal dinner given at Greenwich many years ago, the late Mr. Justice Bailey who was in the chair informed the assembled guests, when the decanters had begun to circulate after dinner, that as it was most important to ensure the safety of

so eminent a company as that present, he had ordered a handsome and roomy omnibus which would be at the door at ten o'clock to convey them back to town. Sir George at once rose, and said :—

> The Grecian of old bade his comrades entwine
> The myrtle of Venus with Bacchus's vine—
> Which our excellent chairman interpreteth thus,
> Begin with a Bumper and end with a Buss.

There must be many such playful trifles in the possession or remembrance of Sir George's friends, and the appearance of the present paper may serve to call forth from many a note-book or pigeon-hole other and worthier samples of his innocent and amusing talent.

THE ART OF CONVERSATION

IN a very charming book—the *Letters of the late James Russell Lowell*—you will find an anecdote of his meeting Professor Mahaffy, of Trinity College, Dublin. The two professors met at a friend's house in Birmingham, and the friend confessed he had never listened to four hours of such admirable converse before. And no wonder, for those who have the privilege of knowing Professor Mahaffy, author of *Social Life in Greece*, and other works full of scholarship and charm, know him to be one of the best talkers living. When Lowell drove away in the carriage, he exclaimed to his host: "Well, that's one of the most delightful fellows I ever met, and I don't mind if you tell him so!" The friend did so, and Mr. Mahaffy received the compliment with equal grace and modesty. "Poor Lowell!" he exclaimed; "to think that he can never have met an Irishman before!"

Yes; and doubtless race is an element in the humour and special conversational readiness of men like Professor Mahaffy and his countrymen; and it is this circumstance which, to my mind,

slightly weakens the force of an admirable little book which Professor Mahaffy published a few years ago, on the *Art of Conversation*—a title which I must apologise to him for having borrowed. Not that I am sure the title correctly describes Mr. Mahaffy's disquisition any more than it will precisely fit mine. It is with the ethics of conversation that he largely deals—on those moral qualities of tact, courtesy, self-repression, and others, which have so much to do with the success of a conversationalist. But what I meant by a certain defect in the premises of Mr. Mahaffy's arguments is this—that he too readily assumes, I think, the existence in everybody of a talent in this direction—a talent which he conceives can in all cases be cultivated and made to minister to an adequate brilliancy of conversation. The writer, belonging to a nation of humourists, and gifted with that rare facility and versatility of expression that belongs to the Celtic race, and, in addition, possessing a wide and various culture rare in any individual of any race, may well be excused for pitching the average of human capability in this kind too high. The society of wits and scholars among which his calling and pursuits place him, not unnaturally engenders the idea that conversation elsewhere, being so much duller, might be improved if only people would take pains and have a few lessons. And it is significant, as I have said, that starting from something like this ground, he is yet found

falling back at last upon the moral rather than the intellectual faculties. For the former *can* be cultivated, the latter, perhaps, not so certainly.

For there is a wide and clear difference, though often strangely overlooked, between talking and conversation, and the rules for each, and the qualifications for each, are quite distinct. They are two separate arts, and have both to be practised by us in turn; and one of the chief points we have on occasion to settle will consist in our understanding the two things, and knowing when to practise the one and when the other. Indeed, there is yet a third art, which some persons find harder than either of the others. I mean the art of listening. "Each man in his time plays many parts"; and in this matter of conversation there are three of them that have to be studied. The first—that of the talker—is the easiest; and that whether we belong to the good talkers or the poor—the *di majores* or the *di minores* of conversation. The former class must always obviously be the smaller. The great talkers who were also excellent stand out in our history. They rise at once to memory—Samuel Johnson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Macaulay. These had doubtless the defects of their qualities, and did not always afford unmixed pleasure by their great gifts. Their talent had its humorous, even its provoking, aspect. Inferior talkers grudged these men their monopoly. They wanted their own "innings" to come; and it never came.

They thought what they had got to say was quite as important, and did not see why it should not be said. But the men of greater mark were glad to listen. It was not the Burkes and Reynoldses who would have stopped Samuel Johnson's mouth. They enjoyed to the full the masculine good sense, the wisdom (as of the just), the keen eye to cut through paradox and sophistry, the ever-flowing wit and humour of their friend's discourse, even though he did at times lose his self-control, and was often very rude. And so, too, the poets and critics and philosophers loved to hear Coleridge talk on those Thursday evenings at Highgate, though, unlike Johnson his speech went on with no punctuation at all. You know how once he buttonholed a friend and began to talk, with his eyes closed, after his fashion ; and how, after an hour or so, the friend, who could not well stay longer, silently severed the button with his pocket-knife and stole away, returning after another hour, to find Coleridge still talking, with the button in his hand ! Some enemy, of course, invented the story, but it shows which way the wind was blowing. No doubt it was not conversation ! " Pour un monologue," said Madame de Staël ; " c'était excellent ; mais pour un duologue — ah, mon Dieu ! " And so with Macaulay, and we know how his witty friend praised his " flashes of silence." And yet you and I would give something to be allowed to sit still and hear these geniuses talk, and, I venture

to say, would not even wish to "get a word in." And the race of good *talkers*, as distinguished from *conversers*, is not extinct yet, though, as has been often pointed out, the extraordinary development of periodicals causes men, somewhat mercenarily, to "save up" their good thoughts and happy expressions, and, instead of using them in conversation, send them to some magazine. They grudge to give for nothing what is worth twenty guineas. And then, too, in so-called intellectual society, there has been such a gradual levelling up, in cleverness and information, that the good talker is rarely so much in advance of his company as to be justified in appropriating so much of their time. Indeed, in certain educated societies that I have heard of, the general average of learning and accomplishment is so high that not only "talking" but "conversation" is almost extinguished. In the college society of the great University of Oxbridge, I have been assured by "those who know" that this happens. Every one is so terribly afraid of every one else that no one dares to express a sentiment for fear it should be decried as a novelty, or scorned as a truism, or by some other test tried and found wanting. Things, in fact, come to a deadlock, with no one to enter, as in the *Critic*, and cry, "In the Queen's name, drop your swords and daggers!"

Now all this is very sad, and may well make us thankful that we do not move always in

societies so highly cultivated. But there is another kind of "talker," at the opposite end of the scale, who perhaps troubles us more, and of whom, also, we have learned to feel some dread; for there are talkers and talkers—those who talk because they are gifted that way beyond their fellows, because they have information to give, or criticisms to pass that are really of sterling value; or who, perhaps, are delightful to hear because, though they do not contribute to the common stock of facts or arguments, they so adorn the commonplaces of life that they are never unwelcome. But there are talkers whom one meets who talk, not out of a desire to add anything new to some subject under discussion, but simply impelled, as it would appear, by the sheer passion for narrating, independently of the value of the facts narrated. Swift, in his *Hints towards an Essay on Conversation* (you may remember Charles Lamb quotes the passage in his "Imperfect Sympathies"), summarises the habit thus: "There are some people who think they sufficiently acquit themselves and entertain their company with relating facts of no consequence, not at all out of the road of such common incidents as happen every day." And Swift goes on, strangely enough, to say that he has noticed the habit more frequently among the Scots than any other nation. Now Swift does not often miss the mark, but I think he does here; and I think it is because he lived so much among the cleverest men of his

day—the wits and statesmen, the Temples, and Harleys, and St. Johns, the Popes, and Gays, and Arbuthnots—that he really did not know much of conversation in circles less brilliant. For most surely the habit he notices is not, and can never have been, peculiarly Scotch. We have a special name for the thing in our own day. We call it boring, or being a bore. The name was not invented, I think, in Swift's day, but the thing must have been, because the moral or intellectual limitations that produce it are not of an age, but of all time. Observe, please, that I am careful to say "limitations" rather than "deficiencies." We are apt, when we are keenly suffering from the infliction in question, to cry "Idiot!" if not something stronger. But to do this would be often harsh and unreasonable, as our great masters in fiction and satirical writing have always discerned; and it is a type of character that many of them have seized upon, because of its humorous possibilities. May I refer you, for instance, to the immortal Miss Bates, in Miss Austen's novel of *Emma*—the finest instance in fiction, because the most free from caricature, of the good, and sweet, and kindly bore that I can recall? Who would ever think a hard thought of dear Miss Bates, though we are allowed to see how sorely her hearers could be tried in patience and in temper? You remember how she communicated to Emma Woodhouse the intelligence of having received a letter from Jane Fairfax:—

"Have you heard from Miss Fairfax so lately? I am extremely happy. I hope she is well?"

"Thank you. You are so kind!" replied the happily deceived aunt, while eagerly hunting for the letter. "Oh, here it is. I was sure it could not be far off; but I had put my huswife upon it, you see, without being aware, and so it was quite hid; but I had it in my hand so very lately that I was almost sure it must be on the table. I was reading it to Mrs. Cole, and since she went away I was reading it again to my mother, for it is such a pleasure to her—a letter from Jane—that she can never hear it often enough; so I knew it could not be far off, and here it is, only just under my huswife—and since you are so kind as to wish to hear what she says—but, first of all, I really must, in justice to Jane, apologise for her writing so short a letter—only two pages, you see, hardly two, and in general she fills the whole paper and crosses half. My mother often wonders that I can make it out so well. She often says, when the letter is first opened, 'Well, Hetty, now I think you will be put to it to make out all that checker-work'—don't you, ma'm? And then I tell her I am sure she would contrive to make it out for herself, if she had nobody to do it for her, every word of it—I am sure she would pore over it till she had made out every word. And, indeed, though my poor mother's eyes are not so good as they were, she can see amazingly well still, thank God! with the help of spectacles. It is such a blessing! My mother's are really very good indeed. Jane often says, when she is here, 'I am sure, grandmama, you must have had very strong eyes to see as you do, and so much fine work as you have done too! I only wish my eyes may last as well.'"

In Forster's *Life of Dickens* he mentions that

when he first read *Nicholas Nickleby*, and made the acquaintance of Mrs. Nickleby, he inquired of Dickens whether he had not taken the suggestion of the character from Miss Bates. I cannot think John Forster here showed his usual acumen. Mrs. Nickleby is a delightfully humorous creation, but the very "humorousness" is a blot upon it, artistically. If all bores were as diverting as Mrs. Nickleby, it would be easier than it is to suffer them gladly. The truth is that the opportunities presented by such a study of imbecility were too tempting to be resisted, and Dickens's own exquisite sense of incongruity was made to embellish Mrs. Nickleby's own. Listen:

"Kate, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby, "I don't know how it is, but a fine warm summer day like this, with the birds singing in every direction, always puts me in mind of roast pig, with sage-and-onion sauce, and made gravy."

"That's a curious association of ideas, is it not, mamma?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I don't know," replied Mrs. Nickleby. "Roast pig—let me see. On the day five weeks after you were christened we had a roast—no, that couldn't have been a pig, either, because I recollect there were a pair of them to carve, and your poor papa and I could never have thought of sitting down to two pigs—they must have been partridges. Roast pig! I hardly think we ever could have had one, now I come to remember, for your papa could never bear the sight of them in the shops, and used to say that they always put him in mind of very little babies, only the pigs had much fairer complexions, and

he had a horror of little babies, too, because he couldn't very well afford any increase to his family, and had a natural dislike to the subject. It's very odd, now, what can have put that in my head! I recollect dining once at Mrs. Bevan's, in that broad street round the corner by the coachmaker's, where the tipsy man fell through the cellar-flap of an empty house nearly a week before the quarter-day, and wasn't found till the new tenant went in—and we had roast pig there. It must be that, I think, that reminds me of it, especially as there was a little bird in the room, that would keep on singing all the time of dinner—at least, not a little bird, for it was a parrot, and he didn't sing exactly, for he talked and swore dreadfully: but I think it must be that. Indeed, I am sure it must. Shouldn't you say so, my dear?"

No; Dickens has elsewhere, in a little paper in his *Household Words*, drawn far more accurately the chronic bore of society, concentrating into the few speeches attributed to the character all the essential qualities that go to make it—the egotism, the absence of all sense of the relative importance of details, the deficiency of tact (that "angel of the world")—that is to say, the inability to detect or feel when a topic interests your hearers, and when it does not, and to regulate your speech accordingly. This is how "our bore," you may remember, relates the interesting particulars of an early illness of his:—

You will learn how our bore felt a tightness about here, sir, for which he couldn't account, accompanied with a constant sensation as if he were being stabbed—or, rather, jobbed—that expresses it more correctly—

jobbed—with a blunt knife. Well, sir! This went on, until sparks began to fly before his eyes, water-wheels to turn in his head, and hammers to beat incessantly thump, thump, thump, all down his back—along the whole of the spinal vertebræ. Our bore, when his sensations had come to this, thought it a duty he owed to himself to take advice, and he said, Now, whom shall I consult? He naturally thought of Callow, at that time one of the most eminent physicians in London, and he went to Callow. Callow said, "Liver!" and prescribed rhubarb and calomel, low diet, and moderate exercise. Our bore went on with this treatment, getting worse every day, until he lost confidence in Callow, and went to Moon, whom half the town was then mad about. Moon was interested in the case; to do him justice he was very much interested in the case; and he said "Kidneys!" He altered the whole treatment, sir—gave strong acids, cupped, and blistered. This went on, our bore still getting worse every day, until he openly told Moon it would be a satisfaction to him if he would have a consultation with Clatter. The moment Clatter saw our bore he said, "Accumulation of fat about the heart!" Snugglewood, who was called in with him, differed, and said "Brain!" But, what they all agreed upon was, to lay our bore upon his back, to shave his head, to leech him, to administer enormous quantities of medicine, and to keep him low; so that he was reduced to a mere shadow, you wouldn't have known him, and nobody considered it possible that he could ever recover. This was his condition, sir, when he heard of Jilkins—at that period in a very small practice, and living in the upper part of a house in Great Portland Street; but still, you understand, with a rising reputation among the few people to whom he was known. Being in that condition in which a drowning man clutches at a straw, our bore sent

for Jilkins. Jilkins came. Our bore liked his eye, and said, "Mr. Jilkins, I have a presentiment that you will do me good." Jilkins's reply was characteristic of the man. It was, "Sir, I mean to do you good." This confirmed our bore's opinion of his eye, and they went into the case together—went completely into it. Jilkins then got up, walked across the room, came back, and sat down. His words were these. "You have been humbugged. This is a case of indigestion, occasioned by a deficiency of power in the Stomach. Take a mutton chop in half-an-hour, with a glass of the finest old sherry that can be got for money. Take two mutton chops to-morrow, and two glasses of the finest old sherry. Next day I'll come again." In a week our bore was on his legs, and Jilkins's success dates from that period!

Now in these three examples, I think, the secret of boredom is very fairly illustrated—in that commonest form of it, at least, which consists in relating facts about one's self, or others, which can have little interest to the hearer; or on a scale wholly disproportionate to that interest. I don't mean gravely to analyse the "cause of this effect," or (terrible thought!) I might bore *you*. But it argues a defect, you will recognise, not wholly intellectual, nor wholly moral, but a little of both. You have all often tried to construct such an analysis for yourselves, when grievously tried. "Little things," you have perhaps cynically remarked, "are great to little men." And it wouldn't matter if only the little men would keep the little things to themselves. And, on the

other hand, when you have been pleased and exhilarated with a friend's talk, you have learned the same truth in a pleasanter way. There was not too much of it. He (or she) knew where to stop; and you have discovered that Sam Weller's remark about letter-writing is even more true about talking—for you can read a letter or not as you choose, but good breeding often obliges you to listen. "She'll wish there was more. That's the great art and secret of letter-writing!"

But a talker and a conversationalist are different things—a rudimentary lesson which many have yet to learn, and yet there is room for the talker in all good conversing company; for it takes "all sorts" to make good conversation, as it does to make a world. There is always room for the talker if he has that right to talk which information on some topic of interest gives a man. When any important subject is freshly before the world, how delightful to meet a man who understands it, who has made it his own, from first-hand authorities, not merely primed with the leading article of his favourite journal; how gladly we all listen, except, perhaps, our friend the bore, who grudges every minute that shortens his own innings. For myself, I am more than content to be silent at such times, and by no means agree that the man who is a listener only is necessarily (as Professor Mahaffy rather harshly determines) a selfish being. But then your good talker, like your good conversationalist, has to

learn when to stop ; and then comes the turn for conversation—for the shrewd objection, the question on some point not quite understood, the appropriate anecdote or quotation ; and so the patient listener becomes in his turn a useful speaker, and so the talk includes the many, and the company is happy and well content because they have given as well as received. But then there must be careful watching as to the topic—religion and politics, for instance, must be steered clear of. And there is another whole class of subjects which are generally supposed to make the very life and soul of good conversation, but which, I confess, seem to me almost useless, if not worse. I mean questions of taste. The very ancient proverb, " De gustibus non disputandum " (" there is no arguing about tastes "), ought surely to convince us of this. For just consider what " taste " means, if it has any meaning of value at all, in our own case. Our " tastes," in men, or books, or music, or scenery, or whatever it be, if they are worthy of the name, were not formed yesterday, and they belong to the very depths of our individuality. We have a kindred proverb, " There is no accounting for tastes." Of course there is not ; they are part of a hidden life, which no one knows, not even ourselves—our heredity, our early associations, our education, besides all those casual and indirect influences that have been all our life around us. These tastes alter, doubtless, with many of us, if we are worth any-

thing. Taste is cultivated, and most of us can look back with something of dismay at the things we admired and thought the best, say, twenty-five years ago. But then change is gradual, and cannot under any circumstances be accomplished by a *coup de main.* And yet we often hear persons engaged in an argument, say, over a dinner-table, in which these indisputable facts are quietly overlooked. A gentleman who prizes his "Thackeray," discovers that a gentleman opposite prizes only his "Dickens." In both cases the taste is the formation of years, and has its roots in the "abysmal depths of personality." And yet you will hear these two well-intentioned men arguing over the relative claims to admiration of their favourites, with the idea, presumably, that they can convert one another in the course of ten minutes' converse. *O sancta simplicitas!* And the same remark applies to those who do not invite argument, but only information, under such limited and precarious circumstances. Some persons have no perception of what can, and what cannot, be attained in conversation, and will ask you questions requiring a month or two to consider, and then another month or two to answer, between the courses at a dinner party! I remember once a lady I sat next to asking me suddenly: "Canon Ainger, what is your opinion of Carlyle?" Well, I hope I have been decently brought up, so I did not make the rejoinder which would have best expressed my feelings.

I did not reply: "Goodness gracious, madam, how can you ask such a preposterous question under such preposterous circumstances?" (I remember I was just beginning my fish.) For, you see, my neighbour was not even opening a discussion merely—in itself most improper at such a serious moment. She wanted, apparently, an encyclopædia article offhand; and that, too, without my knowing (a thing in itself most important) the previous history (as a physician would say) "of the case." But there is a time for everything, the wise man has said, and there are times for discussion and times for conversation, and the two things are far from being the same thing. Conversation is wanted by most people as a healing agency after the rubs and the worries and the exhaustion of business or domestic cares; and discussion, if it brings mental activity into play, is often just what the overtaxed mind does not seek. An overtaxed body, or an occupation chiefly manual, is no doubt relieved and rested by bringing intellect into play—as the game of chess is often found the best of tonics and alteratives for occupations chiefly mechanical and manual. Change of exercise, rather than cessation of it, is the soul of recreation. You know the old story of the man who would stand up in the pit of a theatre, and would not sit down, in spite of the indignant cries of "Down in front!" "Turn him out!" "Let him alone," exclaimed an Irishman in the rear; "let him alone! It's only

a tailor resting himself!" And we are all of us, in this respect, "tailors," and want to bring into play in our hours of social enjoyment just those muscles, so to speak, which we have not been using during the day. But then for most of us, in this fast-living, over-exhausting modern life, we need (carrying on the metaphor) to "sit down" rather than to "stand up"; and with this end, discussion, or rather antagonism, in conversation is almost always a mistake. When we recall the discussions on matters of taste at which we have been present, we shall recall as the happiest and most profitable those in which the company were in the main agreed. For no discussions about taste (supposing they leave matters, as they always do, just as they were before) can end in any other way than that of showing that A. thinks but poorly of B.'s taste, and B. very meanly of A.'s. Neither is converted, and neither made more amiable in the ineffectual process; for the literary or artistic Ethiopian cannot so change his skin. But, on the other hand, intelligent agreement — how it opens hearts and warms them, and brings people closer together! "So monotonous!" do you rejoin? "no interest where all are agreed." Ah, just try it where the agreement, at least, is real, and not merely the result of both parties following the same fashion. Listen how a guest who genuinely loves some painter, some musician, some writer—a Frederick Walker, a Schubert, a Miss Austen—who has,

perchance, long remained silent, and seemed inert or anti-social—notice how his shyness is overcome, his mind fertilised, his heart warmed, by the chance mention in an appreciatory way of his favourite by some one in the company. And if two or three more join in, observe how people are by degrees brought out of their reserve and suspicion. One cites his own favourite drawing, or song, or novel; another quotes a passage or character which others have forgotten; and so they are all made happier by the discovery that they are not alone in their judgment and their liking; and this is very well worth noting, because, on the first blush, it contravenes what many of us have come to think axiomatic—namely, that the chief interest and profit are to be got out of what they call the "conflict of minds"—that it is difference of opinion, not agreement, that promotes good conversation. Argument, in my experience, as distinguished from discussion, fighting, too, for victory, and in defence of one's own ingrained opinion, certainly does not generate "sweetness," and I very much doubt if it often promotes "light"—the defeated party, even if he be left in a minority of one, being usually wont to go away, like the juryman in the story, exclaiming: "The most obstinate eleven men I ever met in my life!"

And, indeed, this brings one to consider the great importance in conversation of the presence of some one leader, or rather "moderator" (as

the admirable Scottish phrase has it), who has by right of his position (that of host or hostess for example) to watch, and by the exercise of skill or tact at once to keep conversation going, and to preserve it from degenerating into endless and useless argument. It is the office of the pointsman, rather than the engine-driver, that is so important. For while it is very necessary (for the happiness of all parties) that a conversation should not flag, it is almost as necessary, in moments of danger, to know how to "shunt" the conversation on to some safer or more profitable line. Great responsibility therefore attaches to the head of a table, or whoever is master of the situation by courtesy. And this is why, as was long ago discovered, a dinner party to be good for anything (beyond the mere enjoyment of the menu) should be neither too large nor too small. Some forgotten genius laid it down that the number should never be less than that of the Graces, nor more than that of the Muses, and the latter half of the epigram may be safely accepted. Ten as a maximum, eight for perfection, for then conversation can be either dialogue, or spread and become general, and the moderator has not a larger team than he can profitably watch over. It is the dinner party of sixteen to twenty that is so terrible a risk, especially when no thought has been bestowed upon the mixture of this human salad, and when the most social and communicative person may find himself wedged in, and

helpless, between two "too, too solid" pieces of flesh, neither of whom will "rise" (if I may be allowed to mix my metaphors) to any "fly" that may be thrown over them.

I fully anticipate the objection that I go on telling what good conversation is *not*, and evade saying what it is. Well, definition is always difficult; and sometimes truth is sooner arrived at by the slower path of eliminating the false. No one can define good converse, but we know it when we have been among it, or discovered its absence. And I think when we have come away from a conversation, our sense of its having been a success, pleasant and interesting, is somehow bound up with that of certain qualities of heart, rather than of mind, that have helped it to be so. The speakers were kindly and genuine, the reverse of self-obtruding, endowed with tact and skill; and this state of things, rather than the stories we laughed at, or the new information we gained, remains as the dominant impression. "It was not dull," we decided, "although not very brilliant." Perhaps we might venture on a paradox, and substitute "It was not dull, just because it was not very brilliant." A conversation may easily be spoiled by the redundancy of this quality, whether it be the ebullitions of the original wit, or the stories of the inveterate *raconteur*. For, as to the former, his quality, even if rare, is a failure if it is anything more than a flavour to the discourse. We

know how depressing a thing the jest-book is to read; and it is no less depressing when it has to be listened to. Even epigrams must have some intervals between them, if they are to be enjoyed. I remember (if you will forgive a personal detail), as a child, our family dining with some intimate friends one Christmas Day, when the daughters of the house, who were supposed to have a talent that way, had made the pudding with their own hands. It came to table, fine in colour, if not in consistency, and every one tasted and said, "A wonderful pudding, but surely much too rich.' And so it was, not because of what was there, but because of what was missing. The young ladies had forgotten the flour! Even so, many a dinner-table talk is ruined because the "flour" is omitted, the harmless, wholesome, tasteless, farinaceous nucleus which ought to form the restful and moderating influence in all conversation, leaving the intermittent sultana and the occasional allspice, to say nothing of the solid suet and the pervasive cognac, to provide the flavour and the stimulant. And then there is the teller of stories, a welcome ingredient, indeed, if only they are not told at too great length, and are fairly fresh. Here, again, all social virtues are needed as a mitigating element —tact, and the quick observation of when the hearer is getting tired, lest he retort, as was once done: "Yes. I have known that story ever since it was an anecdote!" And fairly fresh too. A single anecdote in an evening that is new to the

company, as well as possessing other merit, is more exhilarating than a dozen which have too often done duty before.

"Take care of the heart," then, I would almost say, to those who aim, not at shining, but at being pleasant in conversation, "take care of the heart, and the intellect will take care of itself." For the art of conversation is closely bound up with the deeper, wider art of giving pleasure. We have to cultivate first (and happily this can be cultivated) the art of "give and take." The art which grows out of Chaucer's immortal description of the true scholar, "Gladly would he learn and gladly teach." Modesty, forbearance, kindliness, tact—the desire to please and the desire to *be* pleased—will tell in the long run against mere brilliancy, or the parade of information; still more against the affectation of universal scepticism and universal cynicism which wrecks human intercourse in so many companies in these days.

THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

THE study of English literature in our schools and colleges on a scale proportionate to its importance is of comparatively recent date. I suppose we should not be far wrong in fixing that date at about thirty years back.[1] Up to that time, although the colleges in London and other great centres could boast distinguished professors of the subject, it had hardly been recognised, even in the higher forms of schools at all. School histories of England, in an appendix to the successive chapters, may have furnished the names of the great authors in prose and verse who adorned each reign, with a list of their more important works, but that was all. To whom the credit is due of leading the movement which has brought about the remarkable change in this respect, it might be difficult to say. But there is no doubt that the movement received a great impetus about the time just mentioned by the publication,

[1] This address was delivered at University College, Bristol, at the opening of the Session 1889-1890.

through the Clarendon Press at Oxford, of a series of selected works of the great English classics, thoroughly edited and annotated, under the general direction of the late Professor Brewer, of King's College. Single plays of Shakspeare, separate portions of the *Canterbury Tales*, selected poems of Dryden, and so forth, were one by one issued, under the care of the editors best qualified for the task, and at a price that made them available for use in all the higher-class schools and colleges in the country. "The authors and works selected," so ran the prospectus of the series, "are such as will best serve to illustrate English literature in its *historical* aspect. As 'the eye of history,' without which history cannot be understood, the literature of a nation is the clearest and most intelligible record of its life. Its thoughts and its emotions, its graver and its less serious modes, its progress or its degeneracy, are told by its best authors in their best words. This view of the subject will suggest the safest rules for the study of it."

Admirable words, worthy of the large-minded and large-hearted scholar who inspired, if he did not actually frame, them; and we can well understand how they must have brought light and inspiration to many a schoolmaster and student, who had never entertained the idea of Chaucer and Bacon as possible factors in education, though it had seemed the most obvious thing in the world to study the masterpieces of Schiller, Dante, or

Molière. At the time we are speaking of, the average schoolmaster would have scouted the idea of an English classic becoming a text-book in his school. He might indeed give out a canto of *Marmion* to be learned by heart as a holiday task, but that was for a mere exercise of memory, or to keep the lad from being too noisy on a wet day. I remember how Dr. Arnold, in one of his letters, expresses an ardent wish that he might have the opportunity of studying a play of Shakspeare with his sixth form, on the same scale of attention and precision as they studied a book of Thucydides! But this was but an aspiration, and the times were not ripe for a change, even if the remorseless limits of years and months admitted of any diminution of the space allotted to Latin and Greek.

I do not at all say that the prejudice of the average teacher against the introduction of English writers into the curriculum of his school was altogether unworthy, and to be laughed at. It had its root in a true conviction that nothing was worth teaching that did not involve some labour and trouble on the part of the learner—that did not awake and exercise in him some new powers —that was not, in a word, a discipline. It was this feeling that was sound and worthy of all respect in the prejudice against English literature as an element in education. The picture of Addison, or Pope in a boy's hands connected itself with that of a half-hour of idleness—harm-

less perhaps, but still idleness—spent in an arm-chair by the fire or on a sunny lawn, a half-hour withdrawn from more serious and profitable study. And if any one, reading these suppressed thoughts of the teacher, were to retort that after all Addison and Pope might be as worthy literature as Horace and Aristophanes, the answer would be ready: "Yes, but it takes some trouble to get at the meaning of Horace and Aristophanes. The language in which they wrote obliges the student to give thought and trouble to the subject. An English book does nothing of the kind."

And it was to those who cherished this conviction, and yet were quite aware that Hooker and Bacon, Shakspeare and Milton, De Foe and Swift must have an important message to those who spoke their tongue, that, as I have said, such words as Professor Brewer's came like something of a revelation. English literature, it now appeared, might ask some labour and attention on the part of the student, might evoke and train some new powers. It might link itself with history, or rather claim to be itself a department of history, and history had long ago been established as a necessary branch of education. And moreover, as such, it admitted of being examined in, and the final test by examination has always, I suppose, been present to the mind of the teacher when considering the appropriateness of a subject for his pupils.

From the first, then, English literature has

been regarded by the teacher as something to be examined in; and from the first this has largely determined the form in which it has been taught. The connexion of an author with his own time—how far he has either reflected the deeper convictions and aims of that time, or perhaps only its passing moods and fashions; the obligations of the writer to foreign models, or to the influence of a revived study of ancient literature—these and many such inquiries were seen to be wholesome and instructive ways of studying the author, and throwing light upon his genius and our appreciation of him. And in all sound teaching of the subject such topics have always, of course, found a place. But even here, and in the hands of teachers of real and wide scholarship, I think may be perceived the first shadow of a danger which might in time spread and overcast the entire subject. In the hands of a teacher who himself loved and enjoyed the author he was treating of, it would be impossible but that something of his own taste and appreciation should be transferred to the student who listened to him, provided always that the student had in him the germs of taste and appreciation at all. But here again the terminal examination began to cast its "shadow before." How are you to examine upon a young student's *enjoyment* of the *Faerie Queene* or the *Rape of the Lock*? Even though he has learned to feel, and ardently to relish, the exquisite yet wholly different flavours

of these two poems, how is this to be tested by an examination paper? Moreover, if a taste for these writers is to be found by studying them—not for the history or archæology in them, but for their own sakes and for the enjoyment of them—there is no time for this in the classroom, for that time is wanted for the historical and critical questions that arise; and the student at home has no time for that leisurely and deliberate reading that brings about a love for an author, as distinguished from a mastery of his difficulties (if an ancient writer) of language or allusion. And thus the danger might arise, even with the ablest teaching, that the student would leave the study of an author with a considerable knowledge of his language, his allusions, and his relation to other writers, and yet with but a moderate degree of pleasure derived from the writer himself.

And if, even with our ablest and most scholarly teachers at work, there exists this possibility of the writer himself being neglected for the sake of the facts about the writer, how certain is it that the study of our literature in places of education where such scholars are not procurable (and scholars of fine and catholic literary taste do not grow on every hedge) must tend to resolve itself more and more into questions that can be set and answered in an examination paper, with questions of a writer's biography, of facts and dates connected with his writings, of popular quotations from these writings and the like—with perhaps a

list of the general and time-honoured verdicts that it is considered safe for any one, not a genius, to repeat in society. We all know what to expect when we take up an examination paper in English literature as set to the higher form of a good school; it is sure to contain questions something after this model:[1]

"Name the authors of the following works—*The Hind and the Panther*, *Beowulf*, *Acis and Galatea*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, and *Adonais*. Give a brief account of the contents of these works. To what class of Literature do they belong?"

"Write a life, with dates, of Sir John Suckling. What do you mean by the 'metaphysical' poets? Discuss the appropriateness of the term."

Now I am not citing this style of question to condemn or ridicule it. No knowledge can be entirely useless, and there is no saying when and where it may not be useful to an upper middle-class English man or woman to know the authors of the aforesaid works. But this at least is certain, that a student might obtain full marks in such a paper without its proving that he or she was any the better, wiser, or happier for any of the litera-

[1] [The higher forms of the public schools have, for the last thirty years, been examined by a Joint Board of the two ancient universities. The subjects prescribed in English literature for each year are two plays of Shakspeare, and two other books selected from a list which includes only the works of Chaucer, Spenser, Bacon, Burke, and one or two other classical authors. So that the questions set never bear any resemblance to those given in the text.]

ture of which it treats. To begin with, there may be ample time in one school or college session to get up all the information requisite to answer such a paper, when there would not be time enough for the profitable study of any one of the writers named, if read for the sake of his works and not for the sake of being examined about him. And it is obvious that if literature is pursued in this kind of way, there is hardly any limit to the extent of ground that the student may be asked to traverse in a single year. I have myself been more than once invited to set the examination papers in this subject in an Institution that I will not name. The syllabus of the lectures given during one session has been laid before me, to assist me in framing my questions, and I could only gather from this that in the course of a single year the whole range of English literature from *Piers Plowman* to *Waverley* had been dealt with by the lecturer, and therefore after a fashion supposed to be profitable to the learners. Imagine five centuries of our noble classics in verse and prose — the greater and the minor prophets of our literature—so much as touched upon to any purpose in such a space! No doubt the area covered looked well in the prospectus of the lectures! It displayed the comprehensive character of the instruction given, and by consequence the complete knowledge of English authors carried away by a daughter after only a year's work—"and still the wonder grew, How

one small head could carry all she knew." Yes! the old, old fallacy! The area nominally cultivated—*this* the wonder and the attraction. No thought of the depth to which the plough has gone, or whether any really valuable seed had been sown at all! No thought of whether any genuine pleasure had been acquired through experience of any one of these English writers! Yet only through some pleasure given, I venture to assert, is any profit afforded by the study of an English writer.

May I tell two anecdotes, for which I can vouch, illustrating the opinion I am upholding, drawn not from the classrooms of our own rank, but from the "simple annals of the poor"? You know that of late years, in our national schools under Government inspection, the higher standards are allowed to learn and study some passage of defined length from an English poet—a scene from Shakspeare, a poem of Cowper, a canto of Walter Scott. Well, I once knew of a village schoolmaster who actually chose Milton's *Lycidas* for the purpose, and, stranger still, the inspector did not put his foot down upon the absurdity. It is quite easy to define why the schoolmaster, who had perhaps studied the poem in his own training-college days, chose that poem. *Lycidas* has always been one of the happiest of hunting-grounds for the examiner. It is full from end to end of names, phrases, allusions in mythology, geography, scripture-history, on which questions

can be framed. Just recall a few—the "Sisters of the sacred well," "the Fauns and Satyrs," "the Druids," "the gory visage sent down the stream," the "sanguine flower inscribed with woe," and all the rest of it. The examiner could go on constructing paper after paper, and yet leave something untouched. And so, for the sake of proving to the examiner how many Clarendon Press notes could be made to stick fast in the sixth-standard boy's memory, this consummate poem was drummed into him — a poem, the nobility and beauty of which could not by any possibility be brought home to his ideas and feelings, because his whole line of learning in the school supplied him with nothing to which the poem could in any intelligible way link itself. The allusiveness of the poem—saturated at every turn with a recollection of something in Virgil or Theocritus—essentially a poem to delight scholars and students, how should it test anything in the village boy, save a parrot-like capacity for learning isolated facts and phrases, and reproducing them on paper or by word of mouth? This is one of my anecdotes. Here is the other. Some five-and-twenty years ago, when I was a curate in Staffordshire, our village schoolmaster (it was before the days of regulation English literature in national schools), having to find something to read to his upper class as a lesson in dictation, thought he would try as an experiment Lord Tennyson's "Dora," that tender and charming idyll of the

farmer whose son would not marry according to his father's wishes—a story of sorrow and suffering, courage and loyalty, and final reconciliation. I suppose that no one would dream of choosing such a poem to provide material for an examination; at least I cannot remember any single word in it to make a question out of; and in this case the poem was not set for that purpose, but primarily for an exercise in writing from dictation. But the master, having found the story touching and interesting, doubtless hoped his pupils might also find it so, and thought like a sensible man that he might confer two separate benefits in a single lesson. What was the result? The boys and girls were moved and charmed. They obtained permission to make permanent copies of it with pen and ink. They took them home, and read them to their fathers and mothers; they in their turn were interested and moved by the picture of village loves and sorrows, touched by a master's hand; and thus one very unromantic Staffordshire village was drawn for the moment closer together under the spell of genius. Now, I ask you confidently, in which of these two cases had English literature really justified its admission into schools—its installation as a worthy part of education? In which instance had literature done its high and blessed service—that in which the poem had been studied for its own sake, or that in which it had been studied for the sake of the notes?

I do not apologise for this digression into village life, while addressing the students of this distinguished college, for it serves my purpose, which is to assert for English literature a function and a mission which seem to me sometimes in danger of being overlooked in the very zeal for teaching it. Whenever the use of literature in education comes to be sought for in the opportunity for setting papers in it; if ever the *notes* and not the *text* should come to be treated as the life of the subject; then *propter vitam* the student may come to overlook the very motive and justification for that life. The danger indubitably exists of wearying the younger student by confining his attention to the accidents of the subject, and never finding time to come to its essence at all. Take, for example, the greatest name of all in our literature—Shakspeare. He is indeed the best of all subjects for the lecturer, because he is the greatest. But he is also the best from another point of view: because he is so full of interesting subordinate matter—so full of history, archæology, folk-lore, allusiveness to obsolete manners and customs, sports and pastimes of our ancestors, together with a vocabulary and grammar sufficiently unlike our own to justify and necessitate any amount of careful study. One could lecture for a whole session upon the difficulties in *Coriolanus* (where there is also for the examiner the additional joy of an extremely obscure text), without ever arriving at the nobility

and pathos of the dramatist's treatment of his subject. One might even achieve a famous traditional impossibility, and so study the play of *Hamlet* as to leave out the Prince of Denmark altogether! But do not suppose for one moment that I think all this subordinate matter superfluous or unimportant. It is of the first importance and absolutely necessary. I at once admit that no study of Shakspeare is worth anything that does not primarily take account of such things. Any one coming to that study with no previous acquaintance with Shakspeare's grammar and idiom — with the general differences of Elizabethan English from our own—does indeed "see through a glass darkly." Without some knowledge in the directions I just now indicated, how large a part of Shakspeare is obscure; how many of his similes and allusions miss their mark; how much of his wit and humour is absolutely without point! We are really indebted to the scholar and the antiquary for any thorough enjoyment of a dramatist separated from us by three hundred years. Without their help (to use a homely metaphor), we are as those who gaze at a beautiful landscape through a window of imperfect glass, soiled and overcrusted with age; to enjoy the view, it is absolutely necessary that the window be first cleaned. Now by successive scholars and antiquaries this service has been amply rendered; and in our time two scholars, Mr. Aldis Wright and Dr. Abbott, have done

invaluable work towards this end. The former of these gentlemen has done more to make Shakspeare intelligible, and therefore profitable, to younger students—yes, and to children also of a larger growth—than any one I could name. To have mastered Mr. Wright's notes to the plays in the Clarendon Press series is to have become in the most effectual way acclimatised to Elizabethan English. And few of the most generally well informed Englishmen can afford to despise such help. Now and then we meet with those who profess to find their Shakspeare quite intelligible and to be scornfully intolerant of the commentator's proffered aid. I should very much like to test such persons with a few picked passages, and see whether by the light of nature alone, and their own good wits, they can make sense out of metaphors drawn from some superstition or sport familiar to Shakspeare's contemporaries, but of which no trace now remains. Take Shakspeare's metaphors from hawking, for instance. That being the one familiar field-sport, dear to all classes of society from the king to the yeoman, no wonder that in the hands of a great poet it becomes a perpetual fountain of imagery—from Desdemona's "I'll watch him tame," to Othello's magnificent threat :—

> If I do prove her haggard,
> Though that her jesses were my own heart-strings,
> I'd whistle her off, and let her down the wind
> To prey at Fortune,

Mr. Aldis Wright in one of his prefaces mentions that various correspondents had demurred to his filling his notes with matter of this kind, and had wished for some fine-art criticism instead. Mr. Wright most wisely declined to listen to any such allurements. "Sign-post criticism," as he called it, he distinctly refused to supply. He knew well enough what the invitation meant, in too many cases. It meant that certain young critics of Shakspeare wanted to be able to descant authoritatively on Shakspeare's beauties and defects, his strength and weakness, and to exchange æsthetic speculations with their friends at a Society, without taking any preliminary trouble even to understand the words of the author they were talking about. And this ambition the editor had no intention of gratifying. His purpose was to make it certain that the critic of the future had mastered this preliminary knowledge, without which to pretend to an opinion at all on Shakspeare's or any other author's merits or demerits is mere vanity and impertinence. And therefore you will not misunderstand me in what I have already said of a grave danger incident to the study before us, that the *notes* to any author should receive more attention than the *text*; and in judging that there was something wrong somewhere when, as I remember once to have seen, a young girl of fourteen or fifteen despairfully roamed up and down a drawing-room with one of Mr. Aldis Wright's little orange-tawny

volumes in her hand, exclaiming wearily, "Oh! how I *hate* Shakspeare!"

We are used to this melancholy state of things in the instance of an ancient language. That an average schoolboy, having to read (let us say) Tacitus for the sake of the Latin tongue, should come to hate Tacitus, has long come to be accepted as a natural event. For we know that an extinct tongue must be studied in those writers whom care or chance has preserved from perishing through the world's stormy ages; and, as a rule, these are the writers of real mark. In these the Latin and Greek idiom must be studied. It is one of the penalties of the "survival of the fittest." For similar reasons, the notable writers of our own early history have naturally survived; and if we would have our young men and women study to the best advantage an important dialect of the time of Edward the Third, we cannot well avoid having recourse to Geoffrey Chaucer, even if the humour of the Prioress and the pathos of Griselda should perish in the process. The *Canterbury Tales* must be for a while approached as in a strange tongue. But it need be but for a very brief space. No fairly intelligent boy or girl, of decent preliminary training, should need more than a few hours' instruction to enable them to master all the excellences, and taste all the delights of the Father of English Poetry. Nothing but the will and the taste is wanting. How are the desire and the taste to be fostered? This is

the one real problem. Any one who wants to read and enjoy Chaucer can learn to do so with a very few hours' attention and study. The inflected system of the language Chaucer wrote — the allusions and obscurities in Shakspeare — these are not the real obstacles to the student, and the real despair of the teacher. The real difficulty is, that when the editor and commentator have done their part, the love for the writer himself has not thereby been produced. If the young student at the end of it all does not go the length of crying, with the young lady just named, "How I hate Shakspeare!" at least he does not exclaim, "How I love him!" and unless the teaching of the great writers of England ends in producing some genuine love and admiration for their works —in one word, some real enjoyment of them— the end of English literature as a means of education is not attained. The end and object of all the notes and note-makers, of Mr. Wright and Dr. Abbott, of all editions and all editors, of all critics and commentators, is to make the writers they deal with more endeared, because more intelligible, to the reader.

The great end, then, I submit, of English literature as an element of education is to *give pleasure.* I well know what opposition — even what contempt — is likely to be excited in some minds by this avowal. The image, already referred to, of the lazy boy reading *Ivanhoe* on the sofa for his amusement is sure to rise before the mind's

eye of many, and to such persons the image is one of mere waste of time. "After all, we were right," will exclaim the schoolmaster of the old pattern, who from the first was suspicious of the introduction of English authors side by side with those of Greece and Rome, Germany or France. "We were right; this new education is another name for shirking work—at least, for mere dilettanteism." I remember once maintaining this position, that the highest object of the study of literature was to make us the happier for it; and a little later in the conversation a young lady remarked, "You know, Mr. Ainger, you said just now that we were to read chiefly for our amusement!" I knew this was said only in fun, for the speaker was a very thoughtful and accomplished woman; but I treasured up the retort just because it illustrated a real confusion that exists in the minds of many. To the unthinking, "joy," "happiness," "pleasure," "amusement," are words that perhaps convey much of the same idea. But it only needs that those who *do* think should recall the kind of pleasure that they have derived from some great writer—from Shakspeare or Milton, Jeremy Taylor or Sir Thomas Browne, Goldsmith or Lamb, Coleridge or Wordsworth—to understand that to speak of that pleasure as *amusement* would be a profanation and an indignity. I am not saying that if the study of literature only succeeded in providing its disciples with a larger field of amusement, it would be wholly thrown

away. Better to find amusement in the authors it has to deal with, than in the myriads of ephemeral works that are no part of literature at all. Better to read *Ivanhoe* on the sofa—to find the merest amusement in the genuine romantic vein of Sir Walter, than in the pinchbeck-romantic of ——, and ——, and —— (for I dare name no names)! whose books seem to be hardly in existence a month before they are in their two hundred and fortieth thousand. But I need not before this audience waste words to prove that by joy, or pleasure, I do not mean amusement, but something differing from it *toto cælo*. And it is through pleasure—high and noble pleasure—that almost every good and perfect gift must ultimately work out for us its mission.

To make us happier by introducing us to sources of pleasure hitherto unexplored, and to render more intelligible and interesting the notable works that we had failed to draw pleasure from before—these are the primary objects of teaching literature. And therefore to add to our knowledge of everything that can make these writers give up to us their fullest meaning and spirit—to remove all obstacles in them, and in ourselves, which hinder us from enjoying them, is among the first duties and privileges of the teacher. The lecturer on Shakspeare has to help his pupil to understand Shakspeare; but he has done this to no purpose, or rather he has not done this at all, unless he has deepened the pupil's admiration for,

and thus helped him to gain pleasure from, the poet. The aspiring pupil perhaps (like those whom Mr. Wright spoke of as demanding "sign-post criticism") thinks this superfluous. He is eager at once to exercise his judgment, his critical powers—to be able quickly to give a reason for the faith that is in him. Let him not be in a hurry! *Love* must come first—*Criticism* afterwards. You wish to know WHY Shakspeare is greater than all other dramatists of that wonderful period. Well, your teachers could provide you with a dozen sound and excellent reasons for this, which nobody could dispute. And you could carry them away, and reproduce them in an examination paper, and air them at a mutual improvement society, and be not one jot the happier and wiser for the knowledge—whereas, a companion who had, by quiet reading, steeped himself in the divine pathos of *Lear*, in the pastoral sweetness of the *Winter's Tale*, in the delicate comedy of *As You Like It*, would have discovered, without its having been pointed out to him, that in all these qualities, and a hundred other, even the tragedy of Ford and Webster, and the tender humanity of Heywood, must bow the head before the master of them all. And if it be asked, what room then is there for the lecturer and professor? I say that he is the best lecturer and professor who has best succeeded in inducing his pupil to adopt this quiet and patient method; to take this open but little-trodden path to the understanding

and true appreciation of our great English writers.

And then, as I have said, appreciation and affection being kindled, the critical faculty begins to grow. For having tasted, and become used to the very best of its kind, second and third and fourth best begin to lose their charm. And this is what I meant when I said that love is the parent of criticism. Criticism, you know, has a bad name with many people. To them, it means carping, fault-finding, or at best a habit of analysing and dissecting that is fatal to the genuine enjoyment of anything. "Why do you criticise?" asks the bewildered parent or guardian, when his daughter throws down with weariness a new volume of verse, written by some popular contemporary, consisting of faint echoes of the verse of Shelley or Tennyson. "Why do you criticise? Why cannot you be content to admire and enjoy?" Alas! the question is easily asked; but it is as futile a question as to ask why, when we have eaten a piece of roast mutton, we have discovered it to be a bit of very inferior and insipid meat! The request that a person will eat and not taste, is a mere mockery, though made with the best intentions. "There are many echoes in the world, but few voices," was one of Goethe's great sayings; and our education in literature has few worthier functions than to teach us to distinguish the echo from the voice—the copy from the original.

We claim therefore for English literature as an instrument of education that it shall raise, by instructing, the general taste; that it shall teach us better how to covet earnestly good literature, and not encourage, or waste time over what is inferior or worthless. All this should supply an additional answer to those who ask what practical value there is in the study of our older authors. We most of us read books—or at least those periodical effusions which now do duty so largely for books—and even if all reading were waste of time, it would be certainly better to read good than bad. And there is a great deal—an enormous deal—that is bad every year written and published. I do not mean bad in a serious sense—subversive of our elementary morals and faiths, though there is very much of that—but bad in art, and in style; exciting, but not elevating or inspiring; unreal and pretentious; the cleverest electro-plate passing itself off for silver; sham eloquence, sham sentiment, sham poetry, sham philosophy, and sham humour. Would it be a worthless result of two or three years' study of the great realities, of which these are the counterfeits, to be able to detect the base coin, and at once nail it to the counter? I am well aware that fine taste is a very rare faculty indeed. "Taste," that admirable critic, the late Edward FitzGerald, used to say, "is the feminine of genius"; and, like its male companion, it must always be the heritage of the few. But there are degrees of it, and it may be

developed by training, and though the best teaching in the world will fail to give some young persons a relish for Milton or Spenser, the average of failures need not be greater than in other and older-established subjects of instruction. After all, these same students, who have been bored perhaps with Clarendon Press manuals, will by and by be found to be in possession of a great deal of taste, though, as the gentleman in the old story added, it may be very bad taste. When we find tears being shed over some cleverly wrought sentimentality; or loud laughter raised by some miserable burlesque; or hands and eyes uplifted at some very tall talk that passes in the world's market for eloquence, we feel sure that if true pathos and humour, and the eloquence of having something to say and knowing how to say it nobly, had ever been studied in the masterpieces of old time, the reader or hearer could never have been misled by these transparent imitations. Take that last-named quality of *eloquence*. We have writers endowed with this power still among us; men who having noble thoughts and cultured minds, can give utterance to their meaning in language touched with genuine emotion. But probably many of these have never passed for eloquent at all; the word has been reserved for fluent and flowery commonplace; or what our American friends call "high-falutin'." That all true eloquence is inherent in the thought expressed, and not in the words, is seldom recognised at all in popular

criticism. It is surely a good work to teach our young men and women in this matter also to detect the true from the spurious; to show them how with the most ornate writers, such as Jeremy Taylor, or Edmund Burke, or the Mr. Ruskin of forty years ago, the beauty of the language is organically connected with the originality or beauty of the thing said; that the efflorescence has a root lying deep below, which gives it all its real importance and permanence. Or, once more, take *humour*, of which the counterfeits in circulation are so many. If only we had brought our students really to enjoy the humour of Chaucer and Shakspeare, of Sterne and Goldsmith and Addison, yes, and of Scott and Miss Austen, of Dickens and of Lamb, and of the many other delightful masters in this kind that our literature boasts, how could they afterwards fail to note how much that passes for humour in this day is not grounded, like the true thing, in sympathy with humanity, but in scorn of it: that a vast proportion of the most popular humour of the day is really cynicism. To distinguish true humour from mere mockery, its most abundant substitute, this is one of the surely useful tasks of the teacher in the study of those branches of English literature that seem to be the most frivolous—the nearest approach to a mere amusement.

"Then after all," it may be retorted on me, "criticism *does* consist in picking holes and finding

faults; and the result of all you have said, if accomplished, will be to limit our sources of innocent enjoyment, and to make us fastidious and one-sided." Nothing can be farther from the truth. We may truly say of criticism, as was said of religion in Dr. Watts's hymn, that "It never was designed to make our pleasures less." It is true that it purifies and elevates them, but it does not diminish them in the process; it incalculably widens them. It cuts off from our serious attention a vast amount of inferior writing; it teaches us to know the echo from the voice, the pale imitation from the real thing; but while it takes away with one hand it gives with the other, and gives far more than it takes away. Criticism is meant to make us fastidious—fastidious, that is, as to the quality of any particular kind of literature; but at the same time, if it is worth anything, it extends indefinitely the width of our sympathies and likings. It tells us not to admire unreal things and feeble imitations; but it also tells us how many things there are of first-rate excellence to which our eyes may have been hitherto sealed. It tells us that though Shelley may be a greater poet than Longfellow, yet that an original Longfellow is worth any number of imitation Shelleys. It tells us that to affect to see no excellence in one kind of literature, because we see a great deal (or think we do) in some other more exalted kind; to wonder what on earth people ever admired in Pope because we see a great deal to admire in

Tennyson; that this is a sign of a very low and poor criticism indeed; and any education in taste that has ended in diminishing the number of remarkable writers that we can derive pleasure from, is shown thereby to have been no true education, and to have missed its mark.

So that you see, after all, I *do* believe in what Mr. Aldis Wright called "sign-post criticism." He rightly refused to supply it, because he found that some young people wanted to pose as critics before even they understood the meaning of the writer they proposed to criticise. But there is, I am certain, a place for it in the teaching of English literature. It is very salutary for us all, at a certain stage in our education, to be taught that certain writers are to be treated by us with respect whether we like it or not. I remember some years ago a picture in *Punch*, by Mr. Du Maurier, of a fashionable lady leading a troop of daughters, catalogue in hand, into the opening room of the Royal Academy Exhibition. "Now, girls!" cheerfully exclaims the mamma; "now, girls! which are the pictures that we are to admire?" Of course the satire is obvious and just. The mamma wanted to admire the right pictures, but to her the "right" pictures meant those that her most important friends admired. She wanted, in a word, to be "in the fashion" in this respect as in all others. But there is a right and a wrong even in matters of taste, and while our own taste is in the process of forming, it is of first-rate

importance that we should be instructed upon authority "what we are to admire"; that we should at least learn to suspend our dislikes and our prejudices till we are in some measure entitled to have them. There are certain writers in our literature who have come to be called Classics. What is a classic? A classic is, I suppose, a writer who has attained, by the continuous verdict of successive generations of readers and critics, a certain rank which individual opinion is of no avail to disturb. Individual opinion no doubt very often does resent, openly or silently, the rank thus awarded to a writer. One of John Leech's youngsters, you may remember, confided to another youngster (his friend) that he considered even Shakspeare a much over-rated man. And if such a stretch of independent judgment as this be rare, there are certainly many other authors, of the rank called classical, whose claims to such recognition our young men and women frankly question. Now I conceive that it is one of the best services the lecturer on English literature can render, to point out that in this, as in some other matters, the verdict of continuous generations is more likely to be right than that of the young man or woman, however brimming over with the higher culture. There is a remark of Mr. Francis Palgrave in the preface to that delightful book, *The Golden Treasury*, which it would be good to instil into the mind of every student of literature. Speaking of the principle that had guided him in

making his selections, Mr. Palgrave added :—"As he closes this long survey, the editor trusts he may add without egotism that he has found the vague general verdict of popular fame more just than those have thought, who, with too severe a criticism, would confine judgments on poetry to 'the selected few of many generations.' Not many appear to have gained reputation without some gift or performance that in due degree deserved it."

The only limitation I would have added to Mr. Palgrave's last sentence is this—I would have said "not many appear to have gained reputation, *and kept it*, without some performance that deserved it." It takes time to make any writer a classic. Call no writer "happy," in this respect, until a second generation at least shall have confirmed the verdict of the first. And when changed times and fashions have yet agreed that this or that writer deserves the name of a classic, then it is for individual likings and dislikings to bow to the opinion of the larger public. A series of generations is wiser than any single generation. Of course no teacher of literature can make his students ultimately like any particular author. You can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink. You may lead your pupils to the refreshing streams of Wordsworth, and they may sip, and turn away. But the teacher may at least give his students a fair chance and opportunity to learn what it is in such writers

that has made men admire and love them; he may warn them that any writer of individuality has a claim upon some patience, and some modesty, in those who approach him as readers and critics; that he cannot be judged, or understood, or loved, in an hour, or a day. The teacher may do good service by pointing out that if some of the noblest and profoundest thinkers of this century have confessed that they owe more wisdom and happiness to the poetry of Wordsworth than they can ever acknowledge, a young critic should never think that the last word on the subject is spoken when he has quoted the opening lines of the amusing parody in the "Rejected Addresses."

You see, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleading for authority in matters of literary judgment or taste. I know that such pleading is likely to fall on unwilling ears. In the general wave of anarchy that has passed over our century, criticism on literature has not escaped, and the right of every one to his own opinion, and to reconstruct for himself the catalogue of authors who are or are not worth attention, is severely claimed. The very name of a classic is unpalatable to some of the young and ardent, as implying that it represents the judgment of old fogeydom, which it is their mission to correct. A certain protervity (an intellectual *skittishness*, may I translate it?) in the young of this day resents the accumulated judgment of past generations. The fact that a writer like Crabbe was a cherished poet and

teacher to minds and natures so different as Walter Scott, Jane Austen, John Henry Newman, Lord Tennyson, and Edward FitzGerald, perhaps would hardly weigh with them for a moment in the scale, against a present verdict which says that he is gloomy, or monotonous, or prosaic ; or that he is so unlike Byron or Keats or Rossetti. But once again I say that in such matters the accumulated verdict of the finer imaginations and intellects of the past is of first-rate importance in deciding for us—if not what we should *like*, at least what we should *try* to like, or at least to understand the reason of other people's liking.

BOOKS AND THEIR USES

CHARLES LAMB'S friend who left off reading to the great increase of his originality, assuredly erred on the right side. The danger in this much-written-for age is of reading too much. Placed amongst the countless shelves of modern libraries, we are like men with many acquaintances but few friends. We may be on comparatively intimate terms with the novelists; we may occasionally ask a new poet into the house; we are perhaps on bowing terms with the scientific writers; we may just know the historians to speak to; but where are the old, old books which our forefathers loved because they were true and tried, when there were not so many newcomers that a reader felt himself called upon to give up his best friend, to step across and chat with the smartly dressed crowd of strangers at the door? Why do we not know *our* Shakspeare as good Sir Henry Lee, in *Woodstock*, knew *his*? Has the reader of these pages ever read the *Paradise Lost* through? Will he ever achieve it, unless he be one day cast upon a desert island, and save

a Milton from the wreck, as well as the salt beef and biscuit? Did he ever read the *Faerie Queene*? The only chance for most of us would be to be shut up with a Spenser, as the writer was once with the *Children of the Abbey*, for three wet days in a Welsh inn, with no consolation in sight but a Bradshaw's Guide and a cruet-stand. "Young men nowadays," says one, the late record of whose earnest and loving life has impressed the true stamp on all he has written, "read neither their Bible nor their Shakspeare enough."

Thus, there are books—and books. We read too much, and too little. The former of the two excesses is, I think, the more new and remarkable. In days such as our own, when the circulating libraries, with their million mouths, are speaking to the public, it would be strange to say that there is little thirst for information of some sort. But there still remains a question whether the craving for books may not be a disease, and whether we may not live too little in ourselves, and too much in others. The professor, whose young friend boasted that he read ten hours a day, inquired with amazement, "Indeed, then when do you think?" The old man was right. The master who sees a pupil with idle hands, and fears that, being without a book, he is losing his time, might not unreasonably hope that his other pupil, who is never without a book, is not losing his thoughts. "It is hard," Orlando says, "to

see happiness through another man's eyes." It is also unprofitable always to see things reflected in another man's mind. There are other books besides those printed on paper, which are not without their value. Perhaps, even, it was intended that we should sometimes strive to see nature at first-hand.

How refreshing it is to meet now and then with those who never read at all. What a relief it is from that clever technical conversation which is acquired among readers. I envy those persons, unspotted from Mudie's, who listen to the sentiments of books with as much astonishment as a savage in a state of primeval nature gazes on a crinoline. They have advantages over us, proud as we feel ourselves. Their thoughts and feelings are their own. They can trace them home to their objects, and know that they are genuine, unplagued by the thought that the same things have often been thought before, and are as old as the first man who ever gazed on a sunset. Their aspirations and wants are more awful to them that they do not know a quotation to fit them with. This is high ground, perhaps, and the ingenuous reader at this point will exclaim, "Pooh, pooh!" I am content, if he demur, to take a lower ground. The non-reader, if he lose much by not reading at all, consider well from how much he is saved. Truly, the illiterate man has much to be thankful for.

This last sentiment has inconsiderately escaped

me. Much as may be found to criticise, perhaps to contemn, in yonder last week's volume, on the whole we treat books worse than they treat us. They do not meet with the right welcome at our hands. Unrecognised for their just claims, we grumble because they do not present some others. Often are they read so quickly that their eccentricities strike the attention before their worth is discovered. The much-reader hastens from volume to volume, and learns the colour of each, but not its properties. Thus, that delight of moralists, the bee, might look into many more blossoms in a day, if it only did not care to carry away any of the honey. To make the right use of a book is not so easy a matter as it appears.

Various as are the kinds of books, so various are the uses to which we put them. There are those who read to kill time, as a refuge—oh, shame! shame!—from themselves. There are those who read because some work is in fashion, and it were bad taste not to be able to talk of it. There are those who read in order to give the public the benefit of their judgment—those mysterious men, the critics. There are those who read indiscriminately with morbid wideness of taste, as the savage devours earth. Lastly, there are those who read little, but with discernment; whose books are their honoured friends—"the souls who have made their souls wiser."

Of those who do think—and the practice has rather gone out of late—there are a few who think

for themselves, and a great many who think for the benefit of others. These last are sometimes called, for convenience, critics. All works must first pass through their furnace before they are fit for the general reader, who pays his fivepence cheerfully for the *Weekly Rasper*, and gets a vast variety of opinions for his money. In a spare ten minutes he has the opportunity of reading what another has written in ten days concerning a work which has occupied a third party perhaps as much as ten years. How admirably is labour shortened nowadays! As we pay an architect to build, so we pay a critic to think for us; and so considerate it is of the critics always to extract the faults of a book, and leave the general reader to find the beauties. Sometimes there is a notice in the shop-windows—"A few improvers wanted." It must certainly come from an author who is wanting critics.

It was a beautiful morning in July when we were introduced to a new poem. In a spirit of the purest symbolism, it was bound in a suit of green, that it might shine upon our bookshelves as a pleasant oasis in a desert of law calf or theological cloth. It was given us in the summer months that we might read it, where it should be read, under the laburnum shade or by the brook side. Thousands of hands were held out for it; thousands of hearts were content to watch and to receive. But by and by there arose murmurs. One said that it ought not to be called an idyll;

a second that the blank verse was not what it should be; a third that this simile would never do and that illustration was not correct. Meanwhile those who were not gifted with such subtlety of vision were reading quite unsuspectingly, finding only a delight in the company of Arthur and his knights—winning a glow from the bracing air of the old rude time—weeping with the fallen Guinevere — reverently gathering those great lessons, which the poet has drawn out of the fabled world, and wondering how the doings of an age should have such a value for all time. Ah me! who would be a critic by choice, if he had but the chance of being only a common reader? And yet there was a tenderness in the critics in handling this poem, which it was curious to compare with the abuse they felt it necessary to bestow on the Laureate's preceding poem. They were almost betrayed into smiling when the *Idylls* appeared. They seemed to say, "Well, perhaps we were a little too hard on him when he wrote last; but it was not without a good effect, for here is a work written in a metre which every one agrees to call respectable. We have great hopes now that our author will never return to such errors as he was guilty of in *Maud*." And then the critics seemed to smile again, and to feel that love towards the Laureate which the late L. E. L. tells us we feel to the bird we taught to sing.

Amid so much deprivation, it is consoling to think that the critic usually contrives to retain

his spirits. It has even been noticed that, by some beautiful provision, the more faults he has to find, the merrier he is. Like Ophelia—

> Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,
> He turns to favour and to prettiness.

Thus is there compensation in everything.

My friend W. with whom I was the other day looking over a review of a friend's book, which the reviewer was mangling with the highest enjoyment, said he was in hopes now that we were returning to the good old Aristophanic school of criticism. He said he would see all reviews abolished and have farces substituted instead; and how excellent it would be to see Carlyle held up between heaven and earth in a clothes-basket, and Bulwer-Lytton and Sheridan Knowles weighed against each other in scales. W. went on to say that criticism was not nearly so successful as witticism, and that if Shakspeare had lived in our time he would have seen that levity, not brevity, was the soul of wit. He is a sad wag, W., and always will have his joke.

Almost all criticism is too minute and too partial. Hence it fails to exhibit any but a most imperfect view of its subject. It takes a full-blown rose, and after examination presents to the reader a heap of petals without form or perfume. The critic has used his eyeglass, and sometimes to the injury of his eyes. For this reason it were well if we never read the review of a book till we

had read the book itself. Then let us compare our impressions, if it may be, with the large and reverent judgment of a fuller knowledge than our own. If you would know where to find such, read Robertson's Lectures, or Bucknill on the Psychology of Shakspeare.

But still now, as in the time of the ingenious Mr. Puff, the number of those who take the trouble of judging for themselves is very small indeed, and we have seen that the critics are always at hand to do it for us. There yet remains the disagreeable necessity of forming a taste of one's own ; but schemes may possibly be devised for relieving the reader of this trouble as well.

Yet there are some left who feel that it is only by being true to their own nature, imperfect as it is, that they will rise above it. They feel that from some books they can rise better men, and that from others, which are circulated by the thousand, they take no profit. They feel that there are some books whose essence is eternal, because it belongs to a nature common to all. The world does not outgrow Shakspeare. But they have found that there are other books whose work is only for some times or for some minds. They have found a book speak to them that is dumb to others. It may be dumb to them now and speak to them at a future time. It may have spoken once and now have ceased to speak, like the Oracles in the presence of a deeper voice. They will not lightly speak of such, but look back

with love and reverence to the steps worn by their feet, and those of hundred others, by which they rose "to something greater than before."

To understand a great writer, as to understand Nature, we must yield our prepossessions. When we read we lose much by not standing side by side with the writer. That in which persons differ essentially, is not in the amount of knowledge they possess, but in the point of view from which they look at things. With different centres we have different circumferences. When the centres of reader and writer are very far apart, they live in separate worlds. To understand some writers we must change our planet and wait patiently till we are acclimatised.

Writers may be divided into two large classes —those who write to reveal something new, and lead the reader out of and beyond his present knowledge; and those who write only to present the old under some new form or application. The former is the nobler class—the pioneers of knowledge; the latter we must not, however, depreciate. All that we are at liberty to demand of a writer is, that he give us something of his own. When a fresh view of anything in heaven or earth is opened to us, we are bound to open our eyes with eagerness; but when the book-writer has no part of himself for us, but only the warmed-up remains, the *crambe repetita* of others, show him no mercy. If he write on the cover of his offering, "In the name of the prophet," and we find inside

only "figs," we will judge him as Bacon would have judged him—by his fruits. Show him the door. Critic, show this gentleman out!

It behoves, therefore, the inspectors of the literary market to keep a keen watch for these dealers in second-hand truths. Under our very eyes large fortunes are being made by the trade in platitudes, the secret of which success is perhaps this: There is a class of readers—and a large one too—who like to find in books rather what they know already than what they have yet to learn. Unlike the Athenians of old, they do not seem to care for any "new thing," and are more than satisfied to meet again and again with the oldest truisms. For instance, they know that it is very nice to have a friend, or an entertaining book, or that it is very proper to be industrious and provident. An ingenious poet accordingly writes a book, wherein, under a metrical garb, he tells these facts to the world. The world, pleased to recognise old acquaintances under a new form, proceeds to buy thirty editions. Here, indeed, seems reason for keeping to the beaten track. Fortunately, however, we still have writers among us who look to something besides editions.

One generation cannot decide upon the real worth of a book; only the lapse of time can prove whether it has elements that are imperishable. But every man who in his writings addresses himself successfully not to time, party, or fashion, but to that which underlies all these,

may look forward to immortality as his reward; —poet, philosopher, historian, novelist; it matters little what he is called. A thinker of our day has advanced the theory of "the conservation of force"—how that force, once applied, may change its form indeed, but never ceases to exist. So we will preach the "conservation of truth." The writer may not count on the preservation of his name, but he may look, as a higher consolation, to this, that no true thought, no beautiful conception he may give to the world, will be lost; that if it be only received from him by a few, it will be reproduced by them in other forms of good, and so live for ever.

"Thank God for books," said Sydney Smith; and who that has known what it is to depend on them for companionship but will say from his heart, "Amen"? In lone country houses, where friends are few; in crowded city streets, amid greetings where no kindness is, thank God for books! Dearest, best of friends—soothing, comforting, teaching, carrying us far away from the "briars of this working-day world"; never importunate, never impatient, may we learn to use you as you use us!

THE END

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